

ANALYSIS 7
THE JURY IS OUT ON THE
PERFORMANCE OF NETAS

MONEY 8
FITCH SOLUTIONS SAYS RBI MAY
CUT INTEREST RATES BY 75 BPS

SPORTS 12
CA CHIEF HINTS FIVE MATCH
TEST SERIES AGAINST INDIA

VIJAYAWADA, WEDNESDAY APRIL 22, 2020; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer

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'DIRECT OTT
RELEASE OF
NISHABDHAM
IS NOT TRUE'

Page 11



Corona
Virus
Cases in
india

20,004

Recovered
3,931
Deaths
645



Popularity of old
serials prompts
review of DD
selection process

4



Central team
claims lack of
cooperation by
Mamata govt

5



Sensex tanks
1,011 pts as oil price
crash sparks sell-
off on global scale

8

TODAY
ALMANAC
Month & Paksham:
Paush & Shukla Paksha
Panchangam
Tithi : Amavasya: Full Night
Nakshatram: Revati: 01:18 pm
Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start
any important work)
Rahukalam: 12:14 pm - 01:48 pm
Yamagandam: 07:32 am - 09:06 am
Varjyam: NIL
Gulika: 10:40 am - 12:14 pm
Good Time: (to start any important work)
Amritakalam: 10:36 am - 12:24 pm
Abhijit Muhurtham: NIL

**VIJAYAWADA
WEATHER**
Forecast: Sunny
Temp: 40/27
Humidity: 45%
Sunrise: 05:55 am
Sunset: 06:33 pm
Current Weather Conditions
Updated April 21, 2020 5:00 PM

ICMR 'suspends' rapid test kits

● Variations in results of test and RT-PCR kits forces ICMR to issue advisory to states

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amid complaints about faulty rapid test kits, the Indian Council of Medical Research on Tuesday advised states not to use them for the next two days, saying it will issue an advisory after their teams carry out field validation of these equipment.

At the daily government briefing on the Coronavirus situation in the country, ICMR's Dr Raman R Gangakhedkar was asked about the faulty rapid testing kits. "We have received complaint from a state yesterday and so far discussed with three states. Too much variations have been reported in results of rapid test kits and RT-PCR kits. We advise states not to use them for the next two days," he said.

"These kits will be tested and validated in the field by our teams. We will issue a clear-cut advisory in two day. If problems are detected in batches, we will tell the companies for

Rapid Kits only for preliminary testing in AP, says Nodal Officer



Nodal Officer said. Dr Srikanth recalled that for the last 37 days the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) was recommending rapid test kits to the state governments across the country. However, if ICMR gives standing instruction to stop using it for 2 days we will follow their guidelines, he added.

replacement," he said. He said that a total of 4,49,810 samples for COVID-19 infection have been tested till Tuesday of

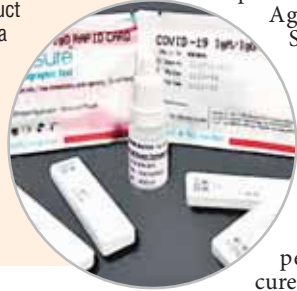
which 35,852 were done on Monday. As many as 29,776 samples have been tested in 201 labs under the ICMR network,

and 6,076 at 86 private laboratories, he said. The Chairman of the 4th Empowered Group (to tackle

COVID-19) said that the government has created a portal with the master database of healthcare professionals and volunteers. "Till now, details of 1.24 crore human resources of various kinds have been added to it," he said.

Details of Corona warriors in 20 categories and 49 sub-categories, who can contribute to COVID-19 management efforts, are available to states and union territories on the portal, he said Lav

Agrawal, the Joint Secretary in the Health Ministry, told the press conference that 18,601 positive cases have been reported across the country so far. As many as 3,252 people have been cured till now, he said, adding 705 of them recovered on Monday. "This takes our recovery percentage to 17.48," he said.



Two deaths, 35 new cases reported in AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

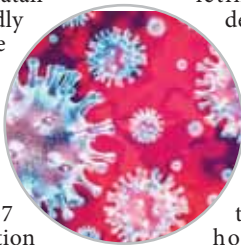
Andhra Pradesh reported two more deaths due to Covid-19 on Tuesday, taking the number of fatalities to the deadly virus to 22. The hotbeds in the state continued to register new positive cases; the tally of infections shot up to 757 with the addition of 35 on Tuesday, the government said.

Four more patients recovered from the disease and been discharged from hospi-

tals in the last 24 hours ending 9 am on Tuesday, taking the total number of those cured to 96.

The latest Covid-19 bulletin said two fresh deaths were reported in Guntur district, which now has a toll count of six.

The state now has a total of 639 active Covid-19 cases undergoing treatment in various hospitals. Official sources said about 40 of these patients were in ICU and some of them in critical condition.



3

IMA CALLS FOR PROTEST AGAINST ATTACKS ON DOCTORS

VIJAYAWADA: The Vijayawada unit of the Indian Medical Association (IMA) has asked doctors and all people who sympathise with healthcare professionals to stage a protest against the physical attacks against them by lighting candles at 9 pm on April 22. "Please light candles at the said time and date to express solidarity with the medical professionals who are facing physical attacks in the backdrop of Covid-19 outbreak," the IMA office bearers said.

3



Naidu: Jagan must talk to parties, stop being adamant

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday demanded that the YSRCP Government give up its adamant attitude and hold an all-party meeting to take the opinion of all Opposition parties in the fight against the Coronavirus epidemic.

The Leader of the Opposition took strong objection to the ruling party leaders attributing motives to the TDP, BJP, Jana Sena and Left leaders, instead of taking their advice to take forward the struggle against the killer virus.

3

Special focus on 4 hotbeds in AP to control spread of virus

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Addressing a review meeting on containing the spread of Covid-19 in the state, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Tuesday told officials to especially focus on Kurnool, Guntur, Krishna and Nellore districts, which have emerged as hotbeds of the deadly contagion.

"More tests should be conducted in these four districts compared to others and more measures shall be taken in these districts to contain the spread of the virus," the Chief Minister said. The officials informed Jagan that distribution of face masks has gained momentum in the Red and Orange Zones and that tests were being carried out in right earnest.

Vizianagaram and Srikakulam were the only districts where there were no Covid-19 cases, but tests were still being carried out even in these two districts with 225 TreuNat machines, said the officials. The government has taken a decision to convert GGH in Kurnool into a Covid-19 Hospital. Accordingly, patients in this hospital would be shifted to other hospitals. Permission has been sought to

Jagan asks Rupani to take care of AP fishermen stuck in Gujarat



his government would provide food and accommodation to the fishermen from AP, besides helping them with essential commodities during this time of crisis. Scores of fishermen from Andhra Pradesh have gone over to Gujarat to carry out fishing activity off the coast of the northwestern state.

3

conduct Plasma therapy at the hospital and an adequate number of Personal Protection Equipment (PPEs) and masks would be kept ready, the officials told the Chief Minister.

They informed that tests were conducted on 2,000 of the 32,000 people identified in the integrated survey and tests for the remaining would be completed soon. There are 7,100 patients in the quarantine cen-

tres, they said. The Chief Minister directed the officials to take immediate action to resolve the problems being faced by farmers by purchasing their produce at the earliest.

Deputy Chief Minister Alla Nani, Chief Secretary Nilam Sawhney, DGP Gautam Sawang and Special Chief Secretary for Medical and Health Jawahar Reddy were among those present.

Trump hints at suspending immigration to US

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In a shocker for lakhs of Indian immigrants and work visa holders, President Donald Trump tweeted that he will be signing an executive order to temporarily suspend immigration to the United States.

Trump on Monday night said that this would be done in view of the Covid-19 pandemic and to protect American jobs. While it comes as a shocker for those awaiting Green Card and residency, techies on H1B visas are in wait and watch mode.



3

Hiring freeze set to kill a million dreams in India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

COVID-19 lockdowns and social distancing have not only triggered job losses across industries in India but are also resulting in scarcity of fresh jobs as companies have turned off the hiring tap, which is a double whammy for those who are affected by the coronavirus tsunami.

Besides the aviation, travel and hospitality industries which are the most affected, other key industries that showed a decline in hiring activity in March in India versus last year same time were retail (50 per cent), auto/ auto ancillary (38 per cent), pharma (26 per cent), insurance (11 per cent), accounting/finance (10



per cent), IT-software (9 per cent) and BFSI (9 per cent), according to the aNaukri JobSpeak Index for March 2020.

Overall, hiring activity in India registered a decline of 18

per cent (year-over-year) last month.

New jobs for professionals in the hotel/restaurants, ticketing/travel/airlines and marketing/advertising/MR/PR sectors witnessed a dip of 51 per

cent, 48 per cent and 33 per cent, respectively.

Hiring across experience levels has been impacted. The senior management roles (13-16 years of experience) declined by 29 per cent, leadership roles (16+ years of experience) declined by 29 per cent and middle management roles (8-12 years of experience) declined by 20 per cent.

The horror tales have just begun. A report by Microsoft-owned LinkedIn said on Monday that 25 per cent of the Indian workforce has reported a decrease in their incomes, while 39 per cent reported a dip in personal savings due to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic.

Those surveyed feel confi-

dent about long-term outlook but are troubled with overarching concerns in the short-term regarding availability of jobs, company's financial situation, and the impact of these factors on their incomes and personal savings.

Leading job portal Indeed is keeping a tab on the current hiring situation in India.

"It's too early to say, but as a leading labour market researcher, this is something that we will be looking at moving forward. One of the bigger conversions that is happening as a result of this situation is focused around the future of how we work," Sashi Kumar, Managing Director said.

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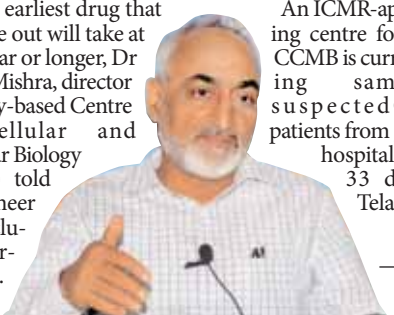
'Earliest anti-corona drug is a year away or longer'

DAVE BENNETT SILVERY
■ HYDERABAD

Although research on the Cell Culture system is picking up, and systems are in place to start testing antiviral compounds produced by various institutions, the earliest drug that can come out will take at least a year or longer, Dr Rakesh Mishra, director of the city-based Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) told The Pioneer in an exclusive interview.

The city-based premier institute is working on new methods of Covid-19 testing that involve a huge number of samples and sensitive samples. "Once there is progress, we can involve companies to get them to produce on a large scale," he added.

An ICMR-approved testing centre for Covid-19, CCMB is currently receiving samples of suspected Covid-19 patients from government hospitals across the 33 districts of Telangana State.



3

Is the YS Jaganmohan Reddy government seriously contemplating going for local body elections at a time the world is in turmoil over the Covid-19 outbreak?

Appointing a new State Election Commissioner (SEC), replacing Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar with the help of ordinance amending the PR Act is believed to be a hint of the State Government's plans.

While the State Government may have every right to hold elections for the local bodies, especially when a mammoth Rs 4,000-odd of the 14th Finance Commission funds is at stake, it is the timing of the election that is forcing one to ask if the ruling party has got its priorities in the right order — holding the election at a time the virus is spreading or keeping the safety of the public at the forefront.



PIN POINT

There are other questions too, ones that the government would do well to find the answers to — are there any relaxations in the conditions put forward by Finance Commission for releasing the funds to states that are unable to conduct local body polls as per schedule due to a rarest of rare situation like the pandemic?

Only those in the government would be able to accurately say why it is consistently linking the issue of funds meant for development activities with the elections.

At the moment, the ball is in the AP High Court and as such, there is no chance of the state government taking forward the election process, till such time the matter is settled in the court of law.

Has the Jagan government got its priorities in the right order?

Interestingly, the tirade launched by the YSRCP leaders against Ramesh Kumar on caste lines is in public domain, while the affidavit skips this angle altogether

In the affidavit filed on its behalf in the High Court, the AP Government's contention is entirely different from that of the stance adopted by leaders of the ruling party on the issue of replacement of Ramesh Kumar as the SEC.

The ruling party cadre and leaders alike had attacked Ramesh Kumar using his caste as a portent weapon, but the affidavit does not reflect this. The affidavit says that the amendment to the PR Act was

brought by way of an ordinance only to ensure that the local body elections are conducted in a transparent and fair manner. The affidavit also justifies the change of SEC by saying that this was done only for fairness in the poll process.

Interestingly, the tirade by the YSRCP men against Ramesh Kumar on caste lines is in public domain, while the affidavit skips this angle altogether.

Perhaps this was done to escape any possible rap by the



M D RATNA KUMAR
Senior Journalist

Court, even possibly strictures.

The questions on everybody's mind are whether the Court will accept the Government's move to replace a 65-year-old officer with a 74-year-old, especially when the age for the same appointment has been prescribed to be below 65 years in the amended PR Act?

Can government show the

door, with the help of an ordinance, to a serving officer who has been assigned to look after an independent body?

It would be very interesting to see how the Court reacts to these points.

Incidentally, the High Court had on Monday put the government in an embarrassing position with its order to remove the ruling party colours painted on Village Secretariat buildings across the state within three weeks. Implementing the HC orders might be a tough task for State Government considering the fact that it had sought three months to carry out the task.

Also, what would happen to the State Government's preparations to conduct the local body polls, at a time Covid-19 has stalled life itself?

Would the Central

Government question the propriety of the State Government in conducting these polls at this crucial time? Will the Centre allow the State Government to risk the lives of crores of people by getting them out to cast their votes?

Can the AP Government substantiate its stand that the State has the freedom of conducting local body polls and it does not require prior permission to do so?

Can the GoI exercise its discretionary powers to stop any eventuality that may pose a serious threat to the lives of people?

A point to be remembered is how the Union Government viewed the Kerala government's decisions on partial lockdown lifting.

Going by the numbers, the nationwide lockdown appears

to be showing some results in AP, as there has been no community spread of the virus as such. However, the lockdown has not fully served its purpose due to failure of the people to maintain social distance.

This is especially true in rural areas where people are moving freely in market places, and in the lanes and by-lanes of urban areas.

While the security forces appear to be concentrating only on the principal thoroughfares that look deserted, life goes on as usual in the interior roads. This situation is extremely alarming.

In case of one person getting infected, the life of almost all residents of that area will be in danger, if social distancing is not maintained.

Here is hoping that good sense prevails.

Elderly medicare hit by lockdown

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Hundreds of elderly people and those suffering from chronic medical conditions in Visakhapatnam are finding it difficult to get everyday medical assistance due to the lockdown, according to doctors, hospital authorities and organisations providing home care.

The daily medical assistance includes checking blood pressure, blood glucose level and administering insulin and injections. Assistants at local pharmaceutical stores, popularly called 'compounders' are not available at most places, while most private hospitals have stopped sending their personnel to houses to collect samples as a precautionary measure to protect their staff from the virus.

Health-care experts said that because of these two factors, many people suffering from diabetes, renal ailments, hypertension, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and other diseases are finding it difficult to get their conditions monitored regularly or the medical support they used to get readily before the lockdown kicked in.

V Ram Prasad, 59, a resident of Railway New Colony, is diabetic for many years and recent-



ly underwent amputation of his right leg below the knee because of gangrene. "My father is bed-ridden and needs physiotherapy. But now, I am not getting any physiotherapist. I had approached the hospital where he underwent the surgery but they failed to provide one," said Kiran, Ram Prasad's son. Ram Prasad, works in a real estate firm, would also get his blood glucose level examined by an assistant at a local medicine shop. But that person had gone to his village due to the lockdown, said the son.

"I have purchased a machine to measure the blood glucose level but my father needs his blood pressure checked, too. There is no one to do it," said

Soma Sekhar. A 65-year-old man living in Thatichetlapalem needs an injection to be administered every 10 days, which keeps his haemoglobin level normal. "My father is diabetic and his kidney is affected, too. He does not need dialysis. Doctors said the injection can boost the haemoglobin level so that the vital organs are not further damaged. But the man who administers the injection is not available now," said her daughter. The doctor has told her to wait till the lockdown is over.

"These medical store assistants are lifesavers for thousands of people in Visakhapatnam. Their absence has made these people helpless. Many of them are reluctant to

● Health-care experts said that because of these two factors, many people suffering from diabetes, renal ailments, hypertension, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and other diseases are finding it difficult to get their conditions monitored regularly or the medical support they used to get readily before the lockdown kicked in

go to hospital because they are scared of getting infected by the Coronavirus. So, nebulisation for patients suffering from COPD, or setting up of oxygen cylinders, dressing of wounds, administering intra-muscular injections and checking blood pressure are seriously affected," said Dr K Santosh Kumar, internal medicine specialist. Dr Kumar said many elderly people, who stay alone because their children work in other cities, are wary of taking insulin, or getting blood pressure and blood glucose level checked by themselves.

"We are trying to guide them through video calls and sending them links. But still many are scared to do these on their own," he said. The CEO of a private hospital in Ram Nagar said they were getting calls from people, who are suffering from fever or other ailments like urinary tract infec-

tion and need to get the complete blood count test done.

"Two of my employees in the sample collection department have been quarantined at home after they went to collect blood samples of a person who later tested positive for Covid-19. So, we have stopped sample collectors from visiting houses," said the CEO. Many other hospitals have taken similar steps.

"We are asking people to come to our hospital and get check-ups done because there are no Covid-19 patients admitted here. But many people still don't want to come," said a senior official of another private hospital. There are organisations providing home care for such people but the numbers covered are not enough, said health-care experts. But these organisations are also receiving much more calls than usual.

Thirty lakh masks to be distributed in urban areas

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

District Collector Md Imtiaz instructed officials to distribute 73,060 masks in red zone areas of Vidyadharauram in Vijayawada, Machilipatnam, Nuzvid, Jaggaiahpet and other towns in Krishna district immediately.

Meanwhile, the district administration is all set to distribute 30 lakh masks in urban areas in the district with three masks for each person. The district administration has procured 2,76,400 metres of cloth from APCO out of which 1.94 lakh metres was given to MEPMA and 64,929 metres to DRDA for making masks.

MEPMA has set up 26 manufacturing units with 2,765 sewing machines in all towns, including Vijayawada. Likewise, the DRDA is making masks in six clusters using 1,200 sewing machines. So far, 1.05 lakh masks were ready for distribution.

Officials also told to distribute masks for fish traders and buyers at the fish market in



● MEPMA has set up 26 manufacturing units with 2,765 sewing machines in all towns, including Vijayawada. Likewise, the DRDA is making masks in six clusters using 1,200 sewing machines

● Officials also told to distribute masks for fish traders and buyers at the fish market in Vijayawada

Vijayawada. He said that the maximum number of masks should be distributed in Vijayawada. District Covid-19

special officer Siddhartha Jain and MEPMA Project Director Prakasa Rao also addressed officials on the occasion.

Door delivery of fruit kits at Rs 100 launched

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Minister for Agriculture K Kannababu, along with MP Vanga Geeta, on Tuesday launched door delivery of five types of fruits at Rs 100 in the town.

The Horticulture Department and MEPMA is selling the fruit kits at the doorstep of people at an affordable price.

On one hand, the measure benefits horticulture farmers and on the other hand, people would derive benefit in the form of nutritional values.

First, the sale would commence in Rajamahendravaram, Amalapuram, Kakinada and



would be extended gradually to other parts.

The minister said that 104 tonnes of mangoes were exported to other States from Visakhapatnam and 1.2 tonnes to overseas from Tirupati.

Vanga Geeta appealed to people to make good use of the State government's offer of providing five types of fruits.

Vedanta-VGCB reaching out people in battle against Covid-19

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Covid-19 pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges for India and the world with the rise in number of infected. As part of the Vedanta Group's efforts to support people in distress, Vedanta-Vizag General Cargo Berth (VGCB) is ramping up its community outreach programmes and reaching out to all stakeholders in this battle against the pandemic.

With the objective to ensure the protection of those who protect people by jeopardising their lives and leading from the front during emergencies, Vedanta-VGCB has provided N-95 masks, alcohol-based sanitisers and hand gloves to



Harbour Police Station of Visakhapatnam Port Trust. The material and personal protective kits will help ensure the safety of police force during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Vedanta-VGCB has proactively carried out fumigation and sanitisation activities at various police stations and government offices. Fumigation and

sanitation helps in killing of pests, termites or any other harmful living organisms and help in significantly reducing the chances of infections for people working in that particular area. In line with Vedanta's philosophy of care and community welfare, Vedanta-VGCB has set up a team of people to provide relief to the vulnerable and most needy sections of society, who have been harshly impacted by the pandemic, and faced significant disruption in their livelihoods.

Vedanta-VGCB has extended several on-ground support activities to combat the Covid-19 and the same will continue through all possible means to battle against this pandemic.

Woman injured in leopard attack

PNS ■ ANANTAPUR

A couple living in a mango orchard on the forest fringe village of Buchchiaahgaripalle in Anantapur district was attacked by a leopard inflicting series injuries on the woman in Puttaparti mandal, reports reaching here said on Tuesday.

Under the impact, Lakshamma received severe head injuries. Villagers suspect that the wild cat might have entered the mango orchard from forests for want of drinking water.

Lakshamma and her husband of Madanapalle region in Chittoor district purchased mango grove near Buchchiaahgaripalle. They live in the orchard and while working in orchard on fateful day, the wild cat pounced on



the couple inflicting serious injuries to the woman. The couple raised a hue and cry. In turn, the wild cat ran away.

Villagers alerted the forest department officials, who took steps to send the injured to Ruia Hospital in Tirupati. Forest officials advised farmers not to venture into forest areas.

This Assamese man walked 1,500 km on foot to be home

PNS ■ GUWAHATI

Amid the nationwide lockdown, a 45-year-old migrant worker from Gujarat reached his home in Assam in 24-days after a 2,890-km trip, of which he had to walk about 1,500 km.

Jadav Gogoi, who was working as a security guard in Gujarat's Rajkot city, was admitted to the civil hospital at Nagaon district headquarters for mandatory quarantine for nCoV. He was rescued by locals and police at Ahotguri, 35-km from the district headquarters, on Sunday evening.

Doctors attending to Gogoi said that besides obligatory quarantine formalities, he needed other medical treatments as he was physically exhausted apart from other ailments from walking thousands of kilometres without sufficient food and other precautions.



According to the man's family and villagers, when the lockdown started on March 25, Gogoi left Gujarat with his three colleagues from Bihar in an Uttar Pradesh-bound goods-laden truck. From Uttar Pradesh, Gogoi and his three companions started walking for Bihar on March 27.

"The exact distance and names of places he walked could not be ascertained because Jadav, who is not comfortable in reading and speaking Hindi, also could not distinguish where he had alighted in Uttar Pradesh. "Guided by his three colleagues, Gogoi walked till Bihar where the others

Jadav Gogoi, who was working as a security guard in Gujarat's Rajkot city, was admitted to the civil hospital at Nagaon district headquarters for mandatory quarantine for nCoV. He was rescued by locals and police at Ahotguri, 35-km from the district headquarters, on Sunday evening

stayed back," Asom Jatiatabadi Yuva Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) leader Dibyajit Hazarika said over phone.

The distance by road from Lucknow to Nagaon in central Assam is around 1,500 km. For Gogoi, the last leg of his journey on foot across Bihar was the most strenuous one. From Bihar, he alone had to walk the remaining stretch of around 1,000 km. Hazarika said that Gogoi was in a hurry to reach home and did not even take a day's rest when his colleagues stayed back in Bihar.

According to the AJYCP

leader, right from the beginning, he survived on biscuits and unhygienic water as roadside hotels, food stalls and other eateries had been shut because of the lockdown. Besides, he did not have money as he was robbed of the Rs 4,000 he carried and other valuables, including mobile phone on the way.

Gogoi's wife Puspallata told the local media: "He (Gogoi) was working in Gujarat for the past nine months. He had told me that he would come back home permanently on Bohag Bihu and start farming in the

village. When the lockdown was announced, he feared we would suffer in his absence and that forced him to come back home on foot."

Ranjit Phukan, a neighbour of Gogoi, told the media: "From March 27 till Sunday, Jadav called me several times from his own mobile and subsequently from others' mobile (after he was robbed), but I was not able to lend any real help to him except to give some suggestions during his walkathon."

The Assam government on Monday launched the 'Assam Cares' app to provide financial aid to thousands of Assamese stranded in various States due to the lockdown.

Assam's Finance and Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said over phones and online platforms, over 4.25 lakh Assamese stranded in other States had been contacted. "We

provided a one-time ex gratia of Rs 2,000 to Rs 86,000 of the 4.25 lakh people.

Another installment would also be considered during the lockdown," he said. He said over 68,000 Assamese were stuck in Karnataka, 36,000 in Tamil Nadu, 34,000 in Kerala, 21,000 in Maharashtra and the rest in other States.

"Through the process of providing financial aid, the government will be able to create database of the stranded. It will help the State locate them on return to the State after the end of lockdown," the Assam Minister said.

According to officials of six other northeastern States (excluding Assam), over 15,000 people, including migrant workers of the northeastern region, were stranded in different States of the country due to the lockdown.

A total of 451.7 tonnes of essential commodities like lime, fish, eggs, ghee tins, mangoes, perishables, other essentials, including 4.5 tonnes of medicines, were transported to various destinations from Vijayawada, Rajahmundry, Eluru, Gudur, Nellore and Anakapalle stations of the Division till date.

For the convenience of rail customers, train movement details and information have also been fed along with train numbers on the National Train Enquiry System (NTES) to keep track on the live status of the Special Parcel trains. Interested parties, merchants and aggregators are requested to contact helpline number of Zonal Commercial Control Office (9701370083) or Office of Senior Divisional Commercial Manager, Vijayawada, and chief parcel supervisors at respective stations for loading essential commodities.

CAPSULE



Maternal uncle travels 100 km on bicycle to see newborn niece

SRIKAKULAM: A maternal uncle travelled on his bicycle 100 km to see his newborn niece as transportation was halted due to the lockdown. He was identified as Dharmavarapu Suresh, a resident of Palasa mandal. He works in Bhogesh brick kiln at Ramakrishnapuram in Palasa mandal. As delivery time of his younger sister Durga neared, he thought of seeing her taking with him some money and essential commodities. She delivered the baby at RIMS in Ranasthalam on Monday. He got information that the child was born under such a zodiac pattern that the maternal uncle should see the baby girl on Tuesday, or else he is prohibited from seeing the baby for the next five years. Therefore, Suresh set out on a 100 km journey from Palasa to Ranasthalam on bicycle and saw his bundle of joy.

One-stop centres for victims of domestic violence launched

VIJAYAWADA: The government on Tuesday started one-stop centres in all 13 districts for the benefit of women facing domestic violence during the current lockdown period. The centres would function round the clock. The centres would provide health, mental health and legal experts' services from the centres. The government has provided security to the victims in 23 Swadhaar homes in the State. Besides the police protection for them at the homes, they can access round-the-clock women's helpline 181.

Kanna swindled money from BJP, says Vijaya Sai

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Rajya Sabha MP V Vijaya Sai Reddy said he could prove the fraud committed by BJP Rajya Sabha member YS Chowdary, as to how he duped banks leading to near collapse and merger, and how BJP State unit president Kanna Lakshminarayana swindled the party money during the last elections.

He refuted the allegations made by these two leaders against him regarding purchase of rapid kits from South Korea and the role of Pragati Bharati Charitable Trust.

Accusing YS Chowdary as an epitome of corruption, he said Chowdary floated several fake companies and drew thousands of crores of rupees from the banks. He transferred money from one company to another and declared bogus turnover making ring entries of the companies.

Calling BJP president Kanna Lakshminarayana as the mole of TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu, he alleged that Kanna allegedly swindled all the funds sent by the Central party unit in the last general elections.

"Will Kanna explain how much he had spent for Guntur constituency or how much was given to Puredeswari? Did he inform the party headquarters on the money spent in the elections?" he asked.

He alleged that Kanna has taken Rs 20 crore from N Chandrababu Naidu to launch a tirade against the YRCP government. The senior leader also did not spare Chandrababu Naidu.

"Naidu is beginning to suffer from Alzheimer's disease and repeatedly raking up the capital issue alleging that the government was hiding virus statics. We are determined to



He refuted the allegations made by these two leaders against him regarding purchase of rapid kits from South Korea and the role of Pragati Bharati Charitable Trust

Kanna dances to the tunes of Naidu: Ambati

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP MLAs Ambati Rambabu and Gudivada Amarnath said that BJP leader Kanna Lakshminarayana has become a mouth-piece of N Chandrababu babu.

Speaking to the media here on Tuesday, Ambati Rambabu said that Kanna Lakshminarayana is a puppet of Naidu and dances to the tunes of the latter. He further stated that Kanna Lakshminarayana has to prove his sanctity by taking swear at Kanipakam temple. Rambabu questioned Kanna Lakshminarayana whether his remarks on the purchase of test kits are against the State government is his party line.

Despite maintaining transparency in purchase, opposition members are still politicising the issue, where even BJP leader Kanna Lakshminarayana also joined the bandwagon led by Naidu forgetting the fact that Union government itself made a purchase at a higher price than the State government," Ambati Rambabu reminded.



Kanna dares Vijaya Sai to prove he took money

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

BJP State unit president Kanna Lakshminarayana dared YSRCP MP V Vijaya Sai Reddy to swear on Lord Vinayaka at Kanipakam temple stating that he had taken Rs 20 crore from Opposition leader N Chandrababu Naidu. He said that he will fix the date after the lockdown.

Addressing a press meet on Tuesday, he challenged Vijaya Sai Reddy to keep up his promise. He recalled that Vijaya Sai Reddy is going every week to the court and swearing on the Bhagavadgita; similarly, he would come to Kanipakam temple to swear on Lord Vinayaka.

He condemned allegations levelled against him stating that he misused the party funds during elections. Making it clear that the BJP has no culture to distribute money in elections, he alleged that YSRCP leaders had spent huge money in elections and came to power in the State. He recalled that he questioned the government about the cost of Covid-19 test kits but in turn, the MP was making personal allegations against him.



shift the capital to Visakhapatnam and none can stop it," he said. On Pragathi

Bahrati Charitable Trust, he said only members contribute funds and the organisation

never collected funds from private individuals or organizations, he clarified.

Investigate AMTZ made testing kits: EAS Sarma

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Former union secretary EAS Sarma, who had urged the Union Health Minister to check the rapid testing kits four days ago, also stressed on the need of investigating the test kits being made at the Andhra Med Tech Zone in Vizag, too.

He said fault testing result kits would compound the problem as Covid-19 positive persons would keep spreading the virus. The test result of the AMTZ produced kits should be investigated to ensure the tests would have high accuracy.

AMTZ has started manufacturing 2,000 testing kits every day that would be supplied not only to the State but also in the country. There are plans to increase the manufacturing capacity to 25,000 kits per day to fulfil the growing demand in the country as the number of cases of Coronavirus continues to rise.

"To the best of my knowledge, no testing approach can assure 100% accuracy. The RT-PCR testing meets both these criteria, but at best with only 90% accuracy. That implies that even if one tests negative in this test, it is always possible that there is a 10% chance that he/she is positive. It is therefore necessary that, in every case, the same person should be subject to a second independent test to establish the result beyond any reasonable doubt. RT-PCR test takes considerable time for the result to come out. In a fast evolving situation, certainly,



rapid testing needs to be considered, provided it is accurate," said Sarma.

The rapid testing methodology, as I understand, is based on determining the presence of anti-bodies, IgM and IgG in a person to find out whether he/she is infected and has developed the antibodies. I understand that the IgM antibody arrives within five to seven days of the patient acquiring the infection, whereas IgG arrives later, when the person has recovered. The results of rapid testing come out within less than an hour," he added.

However, according to the scientific evidence available, these tests are not as accurate as RT-PCR tests. Though they are rated to have 80% accuracy, in one reported case, Spain had to return Chinese-made rapid testing kits, as they had an accuracy of less than 30%. Even if these kits can provide an accuracy of 70-80%, the results obtained from them can be wrong in 20-30% cases. It is

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also not certain whether those conducting the tests are adequately trained and whether there are any technical shortcomings in the way they are conducting the tests.

Edu Minister asks V-Cs to conduct classes online

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Education Adimulapu Suresh on Tuesday directed Vice-Chancellors of various universities across the State to take steps to complete syllabus during the current lockdown period by conducting online classes.

He asked officials of agriculture department to study how the AIR and Doordarshan are conducting classes for students. He asked the Vice-Chancellors to complete semesters online and conduct exams also online, if necessary.

He asked them to study the holidays and festivals in the next academic year and ensure that the number of working days does not come below 220. Before taking possession of the hostels and other buildings of education department being used as quarantine facilities, he wanted the Vice-Chancellors to obtain the utilisation certificates from education department. Buildings should be used again after getting thoroughly cleaned and sanitised.

He told them to ensure that the GO No 63 pertaining to education reforms is being implemented. Students, who failed to travel overseas during 2020-21, will apply for seats in universities, he said asking the Vice-Chancellors to ensure that there is adequate number of seats and there is no shortage of seats.

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Special Chief Secretary Satish Chandra, Higher Education Council chairman Hemachandra Reddy and Vice-Chancellors of universities took part.

Work at HC to remain suspended till May 3

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

Judicial and administrative work of High Court and subordinate courts will continue to remain suspended till May 3 after taking into consideration the circulars issued by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs.

Issues of serious nature would only be considered through e-Filing by the High Court. Parties desirous of taking such matters for hearing through video conference may furnish their joint consent, along with particulars of the issue to the Registrar (Judicial), in which, the cases will be listed subject to availability of the bench concerned and after prior approval of the Chief Justice. Subordinate courts will take up urgent cases for hearing through video conference as per the instructions of the respective Principal District Judges.

ICMR asks states not to use rapid test kits...

Continued from Page 1

The Chairman of the 4th Empowered Group (to tackle COVID-19) said that the government has created a portal with the master database of healthcare professionals and volunteers. "Till now, details of 1.24 crore human resources of various kinds have been added to it," he said.

Trump hints at suspending immigration to US

Continued from Page 1

C Vamsi working in US on H1B visa said, "It is just a tweet and the draft is not yet released. H1B and F1 are non-immigrant visas. I140, refugee, Green Card process and citizenship come under immigrant processes. So we might not be impacted by this, but certainly getting citizenship was never a cakewalk and will never be". On the other hand, several techies initially expressed apprehensions over the statement. Subhakar Alapati, Director Global Tree, said, "What he said is generic statement, it is not a law and it needs to be approved by the US congress. He made such statements in 2016 as well but nothing became law as

it didn't get majority. Already for immigration, it is taking 7-10 years, Trump is tightening this process." Another aspect is that a lot of Americans have lost jobs. But 90 percent are on Non-STEM programme. They are not IT jobs or skilled engineer jobs. He wants to stop immigration, to protect job for Americans. So the least affected are IT and STEM jobs". Subhakar added, "Top three immigrants to the USA are Indians, Chinese and Mexicans. Trump has been claiming that China was reason for pandemic. So in case it becomes law, China and Mexico will be first effected. Also, in this crisis, India is exporting Hydroxy-chloroquine to the US and Trump will look at us favourably."

2 deaths, 35 new cases reported in AP

Continued from Page 1

After 16 on Monday, ten more cases were added in Kurnool district, taking the aggregate to 184, the highest in the state. Guntur district, which is the second in the table, reported nine new cases, making it a total of 158. Krishna district, with three additions, now has 83 cases, of which 63 are active following the discharge of 14 patients and death of six.

In the last 24 hours, Kadapa recorded nine, West Godavari four and Anantapuram three fresh cases. For the third consecutive day, SPS Nellore and Prakasam districts did not register a single new case.

The two north coastal districts of Srikakulam and Vizianagaram continued to maintain a clean slate with zero cases till date.

Of the four patients discharged, three were from Kurnool and the other from SPS Nellore. The bulletin said a total of 5,022 samples were tested from 9 am on Monday to 9 am on Tuesday, of which 4,987 turned negative.

Meanwhile, medical staff working at a quarantine centre were reported to have fallen ill in Bhimavaram of West Godavari district. The quarantine centre was set up in an open land. A doctor, who went to collect blood samples, became sick and fell unconscious at the centre; he was given the first aide at Bhimavaram government hospital and sent home.

Two village revenue officers were among the 24 Covid-19 infectees detected in the holy town of Srikalahasti of Chittoor district. With this, the patients'

IMA calls for protest...

Continued from Page 1

Dr Prasad Reddy and Dr Phanidhar, president and secretary of the Vijayawada Unit of the IMA, also appealed to the people to bring the issue to the notice of the Centre and the State governments. They also urged people to highlight the importance of providing protection to the healthcare professionals in discharging their duties.

tally in the town and Chittoor district rose to 53. So far, four persons from the district were discharged from hospitals after recovering from coronavirus.

Naidu tells Jagan to give up adamant attitude...

Continued from Page 1

Addressing a video conference, Naidu wondered why CM YS Jaganmohan Reddy would not talk to Opposition leaders when PM Narendra Modi had spoken to former Presidents, former Prime Ministers, floor leaders and all political parties to discuss the Covid-19 threat. "Instead of taking the rival parties along with it, the YSRCP is indulging in political mudslinging against every leader, including BJP state unit president Kanna Lakshminarayana, Jana Sena president Pawan Kalyan and others," Naidu said.

He said that the Chief

Minister should explain why he disregarded the advice of rival parties and made "paracetamol comments" that have now left AP facing the virus threat. "The government's failure to provide personal protection equipment to the field-level staff caused the death of an ASI in Anantapur district," the former Chief Minister said. He blamed Jagan's adamant attitude for what he described as his MLAs irresponsible behaviour in freely violating lockdown restrictions. "Had the CM restrained his MLA, the Srikalahasti incident would not have led to 13 government staff contracting the virus. The local MLA held a huge rally to thank

donors for their contributions to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund, which now resulted in a virus cluster there," Naidu said.

Stating that lockdown-2 had worsened the situation, Naidu appealed to the AP government to announce immediate financial assistance of Rs 7,500 to Rs 10,000 to the poor families.

In addition, essential commodities should be delivered to the doorsteps like in Kerala where they were giving 19 items enough to last for two months. Even though AP has a big network of gram and ward volunteers, it is not making door delivery of essentials, the Leader of the Opposition said.

Only 4 industries get AP govt nod

Continued from Page 1

Similarly, in Vijayawada, where several small-scale industries are located in the Autonagar industrial estate, 45 applications were received for reopening, but permission was granted to only one industry on the first day, because of the Red Zone restrictions. In Anantapur, 52 companies applied for restarting but none of them have been given the green signal.

South Korean automobile giant Kia Motors India and its ancillary units have also remained shut. Similarly, 24 industries in East Godavari, 11 in West Godavari and six in Guntur also applied for restarting but did not get the approval for commencing operations because of Red Zone areas, industry sources said.

Jagan asks Rupani to take care of AP fishermen stuck in Gujarat

Continued from Page 1

Besides fishermen, migrant workers in the unorganised sectors are the worst-hit by the nationwide lockdown which has been in force since March 24 and has been extended till May 3 across the country.

As all public movement has been prohibited as part of the crippling lockdown curbs, India has seen several thousands of migrant labourers bravely walking thousands of kilometres over several days to reach their home states. However, there are

lakhs more who remain stranded in states across the country, and struggling to make both ends meet, reeling under the lockdown restrictions.

In view of their plight, authorities of their parent states have been coordinating with their counterparts in areas where they are stranded, to ensure that their basic necessities are being taken care of.

The AP government led by Jagan has already initiated adequate measures to provide succour to all the migrant workforce stranded outside the state.

Continued from Page 1

Social distancing has created a new opportunity to see how workforces can have more work from home flexibility or could even allow for more remote work options in the future especially if employers see benefits. "Our data shows that search-

CCMB is the only non-ICMR lab to be part of the Centres of Excellence (CoE) that validate non-US FDA- and non-EU/CE-IVD-approved kits for Covid-19 testing.

Excerpts:

Q: What method of testing is currently being used?

A: Real-time Reverse Transcription-Polymerase Chain Reaction (real time RT-PCR), one of the most accurate laboratory methods for detecting, tracking, and studying the coronavirus. It detects nucleic acid in the nasal swab or throat/saliva swab. It is the standard testing which is accepted. The other testing methods are only indicative, not conclusive.

Q: How about rapid testing kits and the growing concerns?

A: Rapid testing is generally antibodies-based method. It detects the antibodies in the cell. However, it is not effective. The rapid testing does not

detect for seven to eight days, whereas pooling method detects infection much quicker. Even asymptomatic people will be spreading the virus. So, rapid testing does give some information, but does not contribute much in stopping the spread of the virus.

Q: Is pooling method of testing effective?

A: In the whole country, only CCMB is doing the pooling method of testing, which is more effective in producing results. This method is not only effective, but also efficient and cheaper compared to other methods used. Besides, it is done in a shorter period of time.

Q: Could you throw light on whole-genome sequencing method?

A: Whole-genome sequencing is a method used to determine the complete DNA sequence of a specific organism's genome. The genomic resource obtained from this sequencing will also allow identification of new targets of

the company.

A snap poll conducted by apex industry chamber Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) involving 200 chief executives across industries found 52 per cent of them are foreseeing job losses in their respective sectors.

A significant proportion of the firms (47 per cent) expected less

than 15 per cent job losses but 32 per cent firms expect to shed about 15-30 per cent jobs once the lockdown ends. The thing to remember here is that the CII snap survey was done during the first 21-day lockdown period, which has now resulted in a 41-day long, stay at home for workers across the spectrum.

Hiring freeze set to kill a million dreams in India

Continued from Page 1

Social distancing has created a new opportunity to see how workforces can have more work from home flexibility or could even allow for more remote work options in the future especially if employers see benefits. "Our data shows that search-

diagnosis and drugs for Covid-19. It will help understand the evolution of the virus. The approach for sequencing the coronavirus involves getting samples from patients and sending these to the sequencing centre. Genome sequencing needs a very large number of samples for study.

Q: What is the progress on whole-genome sequencing of novel coronavirus so far?

A: Several hundred genomes are needed to give definitive results. It gives an idea of how the virus is changing and how good can a vaccine be. We can also figure out how the virus is spreading, what is the primary source, which part is being affected, among others. Some other institutions are also working on the same project. We will soon pool our resources and then be able to make good progress.

Q: Has any new therapy for coronavirus come to light based on the Cell Culture system?

A: Research on the Cell



Frame policies to safeguard elderly officials during COVID

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A doctor from the Geriatric department at AIIMS has urged the prime minister to frame policies to safeguard elderly officials from coronavirus, noting they are vulnerable to infectious diseases and that there is a direct correlation between mortality and age.

While lauding the tireless efforts of the PM to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic in the country, Dr Vijay Kumar Gurjar, an assistant professor said some employees in vulnerable group like healthcare workers, police officials, defence personnel, sanitation workers, administrators and politicians who have conditions such as heart disease, lung disease, diabetes or kidney ailments do not have a strong immune system and thus are more vulnerable to infectious diseases.

"There is a direct correlation between mortality and age. These people are more likely to get acute respiratory distress syndrome, the acute lung injury



that is causing many of the deaths.

"But it seems the virus is also more likely to affect the heart than any similar viruses, so they are actually seeing people dying from heart attacks who have COVID-19," Dr Gurjar wrote in his letter.

"We are aware of the fact that outcomes will depend not only on the robustness of the health system, but also the average age of the country. In many instances a single sick person was exposed to around 100

There is a direct correlation between mortality and age. These people are more likely to get acute respiratory distress syndrome, the acute lung injury that is causing many of the deaths

health workers so they had to self-isolate. Most of them recovered but if someone with comorbidities gets infected it would be fatal for them" he said.

Gurjar also cited examples of late Dr John L. Saito Rynthiaing, the 69-year-old founder of Bethany Hospitals, late Anil Kohli, 52-year-old Ludhiana assistant commissioner of police (ACP) who succumbed to this illness and said its evident that age with multiple illness is the most common risk factor.

"We as society and govern-

ment really just need to take care of our seniors as you mentioned in your address to the nation by changing our behaviour and policies for two to three months. They should not be asked to retire or quit from jobs as we know they are competent enough to serve the nation but should be asked to socially isolate themselves," the doctor said.

He underlined the need for prioritising human resources by using them judiciously and avoiding unnecessary exposure of senior officials.

COVID India Seva launched

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on Tuesday launched the 'COVID India Seva', an interactive platform for establishing a direct channel of communication with millions of Indians during the pandemic.

This initiative is aimed at enabling transparent e-governance delivery in real-time and answering citizen queries swiftly, at scale, especially in crisis situations like the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, an official statement said.

Through this, people can pose queries @CovidIndiaSeva and get them responded to in almost real time.

The @CovidIndiaSeva works off a dashboard at the backend that helps process large volumes of tweets, converts them into resolvable tickets, and assigns them to the relevant authority for real-time resolution, the statement said.

"Trained experts will share authoritative public health information swiftly at scale, helping to build a direct channel for communication with citizens," the minister said in a tweet.

"Over time, Twitter has proved to be an essential service for both the government and citizens to



interact and exchange information, especially in times of need. We are happy to make a concerted online effort by adopting the Twitter Seva solution.

"It is powered by a team of experts at our end who are trained and equipped to treat and respond to each query uniquely, and at scale. This will enable us in establishing a direct channel with Indian citizens, connecting with them in real-time to provide authoritative health and public information," Vardhan said.

The dedicated account will be accessible to people be it local or national in their scope.

Whether it is for latest updates on measures taken by the government, learning about access to healthcare services or seeking guidance for someone who perhaps has symptoms but is unsure about where to turn to for help,

@CovidIndiaSeva will empower public to reach out to the authorities, the statement stated.

"It is important to note that the ministry will respond to broader queries and public health information. This does not require the public to share personal contact details or health record details.

On the launch of the interactive platform, Mahima Kaul, Director, Public Policy, India and South Asia, Twitter said, "We understand our role as an essential service for both the government to communicate with citizens and for the public to stay connected with each other. As #IndiaFightsCorona with social distancing, we are committed to working with the Government of India as they use the influence of social media to connect with the public at large."

Over 1,300 firms get MIDC nod to resume work

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Over 1,300 companies, including manufacturing units, foundries, textile firms, have received the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation's (MIDC) certification to resume their operations amid the COVID-19 lockdown.

The MIDC is the state government's nodal agency to facilitate industries in terms of land allotment, permissions and policy making.

"We received registration of some 3,000 industries across the state, of which 1,300 have received certification from the state to resume production, processing or manufacturing," a senior MIDC official said.

As many as 20,000 employees will report to work at these companies, of which 60 per cent will get accommodations near their plants, the official said.



On April 3, the MIDC launched a portal called <http://permission.midcindia.org> and asked companies to submit their proposals to resume operations.

"The MIDC has made it mandatory for companies to enforce social distancing at work, provide adequate supply of sanitisers and temporary accommodation to employees till further notice," he said.

Companies that adhere to these norms will get certification to begin operations and so far, 1,355 units have been permitted, the official said.

Popularity of old serials prompts review of DD selection process

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The massive popularity of 'Ramayan' and 'Mahabharat' serials on Doordarshan has prompted the national broadcaster to review the way it picks its entertainment programmes so that people constantly prefer it over private channels, Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar has said.

The Union minister said the current process, referred as L1 under which work is allotted to the lowest bidder, of programme selection had "destroyed" quality. The consequent "low quality content" took Doordarshan (DD) down before it saw a revival of sorts with the rerun of 'Ramayan' and 'Mahabharat' serials.

The public broadcaster decided to re-telescope 'Ramayan' on DD National and 'Mahabharat' on DD Bharati during the nationwide lock-



down to check the spread of the novel coronavirus, and both serials have been the most watched programmes. The two serials based on the Hindu epics of the same names had been massively popular when they were first telecast more than three decades ago as well. Javadekar said the L1 method of serial selection was "unfortunately" introduced 1990s onwards.

"We want to review this fully. The best serials should be

We want to review this fully. The best serials should be on the national broadcaster. This is our target... We have decided that we must bring in good (programmes), allow the system to bring good serials and programmes so that people prefer public broadcasters over others
— PRAKASH JAVADEKAR, Information and Broadcasting Minister

on the national broadcaster. This is our target.... We have decided that we must bring in good (programmes), allow the system to bring good serials and programmes so that people prefer public broadcasters over others," Javadekar said.

"L1 has destroyed... and low quality of our content was the problem which took DD down," he added.

47 staff members of AMU medical college quarantined

PNS ■ ALIGARH

Forty-seven staff members of a medical college attached to Aligarh Muslim University were quarantined after they came in contact with a coronavirus patient, an official said on Tuesday.

The authorities at AMU's Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College have also suspended a doctor for negligence after he allegedly referred the patient to the emergency wing of its hospital instead of the isolation facility. The district authorities have served a notice on the institution to explain the lapse.

They also cancelled the licence of a diagnostic centre where the patient got his X-ray done three days ago on the recommendation of a private doctor who was treating him for chest-related problems for the past several days.

Chief Superintendent of



the AMU hospital Prof Shahid Siddiqi said the staff members, including eight doctors, had "inadvertently" came in contact with the man, who was brought to there on Monday in a serious condition.

The man, in his 40s, was referred to the hospital's emergency department by Dr Anjum Chughtai after preliminary examination, for which he has been suspended for negligence, as per a medical college notification. He, along with his entire family, has been quarantined.

DMs in U'khand asked to give concessions on humanitarian grounds

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Uttarakhand government on Tuesday authorised district magistrates to give concessions to people outside containment zones on humanitarian and practical grounds during the extended coronavirus lockdown.

"It has been left to the DMs to make concessions to people on both humanitarian and practical grounds during the lockdown" Rawat said in a video message.

"The marriage season has begun. We have told the DMs to allow families to go ahead with marriages if they adhere to the norms of social distancing," he said. People who got stuck outside their homes due to sudden imposition of the lockdown can now return home with the permission of the district magistrate, he said.

People who got stuck outside their homes due to sudden imposition of the lockdown can now return home with the permission of the district magistrate, Rawat said

Meanwhile, Rawat also appealed to people to show sensitivity towards frontline corona warriors like police and healthcare personnel, saying it will strengthen the country's fight against the pandemic.

"Police personnel are standing in the scorching sun and healthcare professionals like nurses, ashra and anganvadi volunteers are working 24x7 risking their own lives to save others. They deserve every bit of our respect. We must offer them food and water. It will boost their morale manifold and strengthen our fight against the pandemic," he said.

The chief minister also asked people to be kind to animals including street dogs and feed them. He thanked the people for their cooperation in the containment measures being taken to fight the pandemic, saying their restraint during the extended lockdown has helped minimise the effects of coronavirus. Rawat said he expected the same cooperation from them in the future to ensure the success of steps taken by the government to contain the virus.

Some of the norms being followed during the lockdown may have to be continued even after it is lifted, he said.

Delhi LG visits shelter homes

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Anil Bajjal on Tuesday took stock of the lockdown implementation in the national capital and visited temporary shelters for migrant workers and the homeless to review arrangements.

According to an official, the lieutenant governor visited two schools at Ludlow Castle Number 2 that have been converted into shelter homes amid the ongoing lockdown to combat the coronavirus outbreak. Bajjal, along with top officers, also made a surprise inspection of a night shelter being run by the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB).

On Monday, the total number of coronavirus cases in Delhi rose to 2,081, with 78 fresh cases and two deaths being reported in a day.

Northern rlys to deliver its first order of 2,000 masks

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Having made face masks out of fabric meant for employees' uniforms, the Northern Railways has bagged its first order of 2,000 masks that are washable, cheap and even available in orange, the colour worn by trackmen on duty.

A Delhi Residents' Welfare Association is the Northern Railways' first paying client and received the first batch of these masks on Tuesday.

With the government making wearing of masks mandatory in public and at the workplace, these come at a cost Rs 5.94 each against the market price of Rs 7.50 and could well serve to meet the rising demand of masks in the coming days.

Its USP of being a multi-use mask gives it a leg up from the



ordinary masks which have to be disposed off after every use, making it an expensive affair for any household.

Since the priority for railways is to cater to the needs of its employees, the masks made by the zone will first be distributed among its 1.3 lakh employees.

The workshops under the zone have already manufactured 35,000 masks, officials said, adding that by May end the figure is likely to touch a lakh.

"They are such a hit now that some RWA's have shown interest in them and are placing orders. They are made of surplus cloth meant for uniforms for our employees which remained unused. We have received orders from a RWA and we will be supplying them with the reusable masks," Arun Arora, Principal Chief Mechanical Engineer of Northern Railway told PTI.

The zone will be fabricating 10,000 such masks every week, some of which will be given to railway employees while others will be given to associations which are requesting them on a payment basis, he said. The Jagadhri Workshop of northern railway has in fact also made disposable masks for the railways' medical staff, the cloth for which is being bought separately.

Indian Internet infra not prepared for shift to online teaching-learning, says QS report

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Internet infrastructure is not ready for the paradigm shift to online learning mandated by the situation arising due to COVID-19, according to a report by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), which comes out with coveted global ranking for educational institutions.

The report titled "COVID-19: A wake up call for telecom service providers" is based on a survey conducted by QS I Guage, which rates colleges and universities in India with complete operational control held by London-based QS.

The report pointed out connectivity and signal issues as the most prevailing problems faced by students while attending online classes. "The survey pointed out that the infrastructure in terms of technology in



India has not achieved a state of quality so as to ensure sound delivery of online classes to students across the country. It is seen that both the state and the private players have not yet managed to overcome technical challenges, for instance, in providing adequate power supply and ensuring effective connectivity as the

data reveals," the report said.

"Although, due to the outbreak of COVID-19, the world had witnessed a massive shift from the traditional Face to Face (F2F) to online platform as a mode of delivery of classes. Due to lack of proper infrastructure, a shift to a total reliance on the online platform for the

The report titled "COVID-19: A wake up call for telecom service providers" is based on a survey conducted by QS I Guage, which rates colleges and universities in India with complete operational control held by London-based QS

delivery of lectures seems to be a distant dream," it added.

According to the report, the survey with over 7600 respondents found that in order to use internet at home, 72.60 percent of the respondents use mobile hotspot, 15 pc use home broadband, 9.68 pc use WiFi dongle and 1.85 pc have poor to no

internet connectivity.

"The data revealed that amongst the respondents who used home broadband, over 3 pc faced cable cuts, 53 pc faced poor connectivity, 11.47 pc faced power issues and 32 pc faced signal issues. When it came to mobile hotspot, 40.18 pc faced poor connectivity, 3.19 pc faced power issues and 56.63 pc faced signal issues. "Studies and reports regarding the consumption of power by the state authorities reveal that the states are not using power entirely due to COVID-19 situation thereby leaving a surplus supply for private entities and general public," it said.

Schools and colleges were closed in the country ahead of nationwide lockdown announced on March 24 to contain the spread of coronavirus. The lockdown has now been extended till May 3.

Palghar lynching: Bharti asks Maha CM to book cops for murder

PNS ■ BHOPAL

BJP vice president Uma Bharti on Tuesday urged Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray to register a case of murder against the policemen who failed to save three men, including two seers, from being lynched by a mob in Palghar district.

In a letter to Thackeray, the former Union minister termed the lynching of seers as a great sin and said she was observing a one-day fast on Tuesday to repent the incident.

She said all those found guilty of the crime should be punished.

"I request that you (Thackeray) punish the murderers, including all the police personnel, otherwise you will also be a partner to this sin," Bharti said in the letter.

She said the "helpless sadhus



were holding hands of policemen and pleading for protection".

"But instead of saving the seers, the policemen handed them over to the crowd and saved themselves. The policemen are also accused of killing. A case should be registered against them under IPC section 302 (murder). If they wanted, they could have saved the seers by firing in the air, she said.

Bharti said she will visit the

incident site after the lockdown is lifted.

"I am observing fast at my residence in Bhopal today for atonement, and I have appealed to the sadhu samaj to observe a day-long fast while staying at their places," the BJP leader said in the letter.

She said the killing of the great sadhus by a mob in Palghar is a heinous crime in terms of law, but a great sin in the eyes of religion.

The incident took place on the night of April 16 when three men - two seers and their driver - were going from Mumbai to a car towards Surat in Gujarat to attend a funeral.

Their vehicle was stopped near a village in Palghar district where the three were dragged out of the car and beaten to death with sticks by a mob on suspicion that they were child-lifters.

SHORT READS



IAF choppers airlift essential commodities to remote Arunachal

ITANAGAR: Indian Air Force (IAF) choppers are airlifting essential commodities and medical equipment to a remote Arunachal Pradesh area without road connectivity. Vijaynagar, a remote circle in Changlang district without road connectivity is strategically located along the India-China-Myanmar tri-junction. It comprises of 16 villages and has a population of 4,438. The nearest town is Miao which is 157 km away and takes about six-days to reach by foot. IAF choppers are airlifting essential commodities and medical equipment to Vijaynagar circle, Arunachal Pradesh Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs minister Kamrang Mossang said on Monday. "With Chief Minister Pema Khandu approving sorties by helicopters of Skyone and IAF to airlift rice given by the Centre under National Food Security Act, five kg free rice have been provided to each ration card holder besides other essential commodities, including medical equipment from Miao to Vijaynagar," Mossang said.

Nurses in Ghaziabad hosp demand active quarantine

GHAZIABAD: Nurses at a hospital here demanded that they be put under active quarantine as they are treating COVID-19 patients. On Monday, they also lodged complaints with the health department that the personal protective equipment (PPE) being provided to them was sub-standard. One of the nurses said as there were coronavirus patients at the district combined hospital in Sanjay Nagar arrangements should be made to quarantine medical staff. Another nursing staff said the PPE given to them is sub-standard. Chief Medical Superintendent of the hospital Naresh Vij told PTI that only two COVID-19 patients were admitted here while "we have a 100-bed facility". Just for two patients the whole medical staff cannot be kept in active quarantine in hotels and other facilities, he said.

Man arrested for posting objectionable pictures of PM, CM

BAHRAICH (UP): A man was arrested here on Tuesday for allegedly posting objectionable pictures of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and other leaders on social media. A resident of Qudauni locality under Kaiserganj police station area, Mohammed Imran Sheikh had posted objectionable pictures of the prime minister, the chief minister and other leaders on his Facebook wall on Monday, Superintendent of Police Vipin Mishra said. As soon as the police got the information about it, a case was lodged and he was arrested, the SP said, adding his phone with objectionable material has been confiscated.

PAPER WITH PASSION

No lynchings, please

As we battle the darkest hour of our times, the virus should be the only priority, not politicisation of the kind at Palghar



They say paranoia is more dangerous than anything else. And the Coronavirus, with uncertainty about its cure and its predatory march on life, has sent us into spasms of madness. As we do not have any explanation or understanding of the virus, as insecurity and helplessness weaken us, we shift our fury to anything that remotely fits into a box called reason. Or the way we would like to define it. What else can explain the mob lynching three men in Maharashtra's Palghar district, two of them mendicants apparently,

thinking they were thieves who were out to steal goods and possibly even kidnap children? The crowd, comprising mostly tribals, had formed community vigilante groups as a self-protective measure in the times of the virus. They mobilised themselves after they received information that organ-harvesting gangs and child lifters were operating in the area. The police, who are stretched to the seams in enforcing the lockdown, were clearly overwhelmed by this human malady of distrust and hatred. And considering that sadhus were involved, soon political parties seized a new talking point, giving it a communal colour. Union Home Minister Amit Shah even called up Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray to ensure that the culprits be brought to justice, considering that the incident could have a negative impact on the BJP's core constituency. The communal card has also been played on social media by extreme Islamophobists after the indiscretions of Tablighi Jamaat — indeed a most irresponsible lot — to amp up demonisation of an otherness they can rationalise *vis-à-vis* the spread of the virus. We could do without xenophobia of any kind, be it on social media or in reality, during a pandemic that doesn't spare anybody. There has been a lot of hue and cry over famous personalities being blocked out by Twitter for incendiary remarks from both sides of the divide, leading to the accusation that the social media clampdown was part of a US conspiracy, which didn't like to see things from an Indian perspective. We certainly cannot allow this kind of extremism of thoughts, political opportunism or a dilution of priorities during the nation's darkest hour. Or endorse a behavioural code separating COVID-19 patients into wards based on their religion. There is enough stigma going around the virus-affected and even frontline health warriors themselves. Surely we could do without adding more variants to it. India's civilisational moorings are compassionate and accommodative and are being tested at this moment of crisis. We would be winners if we make it through, losers if we demonise and kill our own.

Of course, at the administrative level, the Palghar incident represents a terrible failure of the law and order machinery. Lockdown or not, the State cannot be allowed to descend into chaos. The job of the police is to prevent such a mess. The State Government must, therefore, take the strictest action against the police, which cannot be seen as caving into the mob instead of reining it in. We must also remember that too many examples and media reports of police negligence and inaction will erode faith in the law and order machinery. And at a time when food riots or migrants' discontent are pushing the barricades of civic life, a system has to appear robust. Else, even the lockdown would not hold. As fear, panic and anxiety loom large, the forces must be calm, alert and composed and should nip every rumour in the bud. It is not like the police did not sense a gathering of people was up to something or the basis of their fears, real or imagined. It shouldn't have led the situation to slide to this extent. In fact, the police in all States should maintain a reassuring community outreach to streamline COVID-19 management instead of frittering away resources for trivial issues. Any administrative authority now needs to appear sterner and ensure the enforcement of the rule of law. None of us can afford lynchings and riots at a time of a national health emergency. The nation's job is to save lives, not watch them waste away silently.

Sailing into the sunset

The last cruise ships sailing the open seas have docked and disgorged their passengers. What next for this industry?



A news story published by the *BBC* spoke about the cruise ship *MSC Magnifica* as the last one on planet earth. Well, the story itself said that this was not technically true as there are two other ships, the *Pacific Princess* and the *Costa Deliziosa* that are about to disembark their passengers and crew. By the time this goes to print, it is likely that all three ships would have docked and emptied out. But the question is whether this will be the last ship sailing with passengers. As is known, for many tourists, cruises are

the ideal vacation. Be that as it may, the spread of the COVID-19 outbreak has also proved that as much convenience and luxury it offers, cruises also provide a golden opportunity to get sick. The cruise ship industry, like every other part of the travel and tourism sector, is under immense stress at this point of time. But given that cruise ships such as the notorious *Diamond Princess* that docked at Yokohama, Japan, became a focal point of the viral outbreak, is there going to be a return of the floating cities? Some of the largest ships across the world have a combined passenger and crew complement of close to 10,000 souls. Yet, by their very size and the fact that they are self-contained spaces, the ships became a harbour for disease. This followed a few years when huge outbreaks of diarrhoea overtook ships, particularly in the US. This has led to speculation that this particular part of the travel and tourism sector might take a lot longer time to revive than others. The bad public relations that the industry has suffered might mean that the golden age of the cruise ships, which constantly got larger and larger and brushed off disasters like the *Costa Concordia* with ease, is over. Hopefully when the COVID-19 pandemic is over, the cruise industry will do its best to lure the passengers with cheaper prices.

Back home, there will be a huge impact on employment. Here, it must be kept in mind that the cruise industry's economic model is one that hires people from poor countries, who are willing to endure exploitation and mistreatment. Thousands of Indians had been working onboard such ships, which included the cleaning staff, those in the kitchens and even entertainers. Of course, there were the merchant navy officers running the ships, too. Many of them, like millions of other Indians, will not have a job to return to anytime soon. With the entire travel industry expected to be in the doldrums for a couple of years, there maybe be very few options as well. India would do well to encourage smaller cruise lines to operate in and around its shores once this crisis is over. If for nothing else but to get its people working again. It must use the post-COVID-19 situation as an opportunity to grab a larger slice of the tourist trade whenever it does recover.

Sun will shine, again

With more than 20,000 deaths, Spain, which used to be a tourism hotspot, has turned into a contagion hotbed. But hopes are high that it will soon be able to return to normalcy



ASHOK K MEHTA

In Europe, Spain, with a population of 46 million, is closely following the footsteps of Italy in terms of COVID-19 fatalities. It has suffered more deaths per million inhabitants than any other nation with the death toll crossing 20,000 on April 17. There were more than 9,000 new cases on March 31 and 950 deaths on April 2, the biggest daily death figure. These horrific statistics were provided by the Spanish Government's top scientific advisor on the pandemic, Fernando Simon. Immunologist Alexander Edgar of the University of Reading said, "A lot of the spread had happened before people realised. Most of them assumed that the problem was elsewhere — Wuhan, which was shut off since January."

This is analogous with Myanmar's Health Minister saying in Yangon when it claimed zero COVID-19 that "Hubei was 1,200 miles away from the country though it shares a 1,900-mile border with China." The three main reasons for the high fatality rate in Spain are the country's slow response; demography and social behaviour; and low testing capacity. This, despite the country having an excellent healthcare system and not to forget the high-life expectancy in Europe due to its Mediterranean diet. But Spain's ageing population has been shrinking since 2010 due to recession and migration. More people died in 2018 than were being born here and the pandemic started with the elderly contracting it first, like in Italy where social and cultural behaviour matches that of Spain's.

On a holiday in Spain months before the outbreak of the Wuhan virus, one had heard of the Spanish flu and influenza pandemic that occurred in 1918-1919 during and after World War I, where one in three human beings were infected and around 17 million to 100 million perished across the world. Calling the flu Spanish is a misnomer: It started in Kansas at Fort Riley when the US was preparing to join the war. Others say it started in the congested trenches of Europe, which at that time were filled with young men and later American soldiers. The Spanish flu was really bad as it came in three waves and reached across the world, including Africa and Australia. Medicine, too, was not extensively developed.

The holiday was memorable. Ethiopian Airlines describes Madrid as the city of great monuments. I would add museums and Plaza Mayor to that list. It has just one cathedral and that, too, constructed in the mid-20th century as the Archbishop of Toledo, the old capital of Spain, would not allow it. Madrid sits astride Rio Manzanares with gentle slopes on both sides of the river connecting the two parts of the capital with a blend of ancient and ultra-modern bridges, marvels of architecture reflecting the extraordinary vision of the Spanish rulers building six-lane bridges in 16th century.

On both sides of the river are walkways, partly covering the Madrid marathon cycling tracks. Spaniards ride bicycles whenever and



wherever they can. September is a great time to arrive in Madrid's new and a design wonder airport where immigration officials took just four seconds to stamp my congested passport. But immigration rules will change now.

Madrid has one palace, one cathedral, more than 50 museums, 46 art galleries and 23 concert venues. All of these were renovated for the 400th anniversary of the Plaza Mayor, which records Madrid's heartbeat with its ancient square and adjoining food and wine markets.

I am not a connoisseur of wine but Spanish *rioja* is excellent at 3 to 4 euro per bottle. In Madrid, in the grocery shops, I could find only Spanish wine. A bottle a day is bound to keep spirits high, ideally with fresh strawberries, ham and cherries. Bar Nakama, a hole in the wall, is run by the solitary English-speaking barman Robert. Nakama, he explained, meant "friend" in Japanese, though we never saw a Japanese in here. In his bar one could buy a glass of reasonable wine for 2 euro, which is accompanied by plentiful snacks and gratis. Excellent espresso coffee and Spanish beer were available, too.

All roadside cafes charge 1 to 2 euro extra for service except the chain 100Mantidelo, where self service rules, which is pronto. Madrid is not expensive like London and Paris or even Brussels and Amsterdam. Though museums charge an

“ SEPTEMBER IS THE MONTH FOR ART, MUSIC AND THEATRE FESTIVALS ORGANISED BY DCODE, SUPPLEMENTED BY EXHIBITIONS AND CONCERTS BY ARTE MADRID AND APPERTURA. WORLD CLASS BANDS, BROADWAY MUSICALS, ENGLISH THEATRE ARTISTES, FLAMENCO DANCERS, SINGERS AND GUITARISTS, ALL PERFORM HERE ”

average of 7 to 10 euros, many are free between 7 and 9 on some days and gratis all times for EU and Latin American nationals.

September is also the month for art, music and theatre festivals organised by DCode, supplemented by exhibitions and concerts by Arte Madrid and Appertura. World class bands, including Team Gallagher and Oasis, Broadway musicals, English theatre artistes, flamenco dancers, singers and guitarists, all perform here. Bull fighting happens only between April and June but Spain stands divided on whether the sport should stay or be banned altogether. Madrid boasts of a three Michelin-star restaurant Cairella Bistrot that has a Valencian chef. The most famous landmark is that of a male Spaniard, leaning on a balustrade near Calle Alamedine and Calle Mayor June. Most tourists mistake the bronze life-size statue for real and brush past it whispering inanities and rubbing its bottom for good luck. They call him the good bum. Toledo is a world model tourist attraction. On a Sunday, it was bursting with human kind with tour guide-led columns crawling like ants. It takes an hour to reach the old capital of Spain, which is surrounded on three sides by River Tagus. From the moment one alights the bus, one is elevated to Plaza de Zocodover on a series of escalators rising 500 feet to reach the panoramic heights of the old city famed for

a blend of three cultures.

Over a period of time, Christians, Moors and Jews lived together peacefully (not quite like today in West Bank in Jerusalem). A 10th century mosque, preserved for two centuries before it was turned into a chapel, is in good shape. Toledo's cathedral, built in the 13th century contains El Greco masterpieces of de-robing Christ. The bell in the tower weighing 30,000 kilos apparently rang only once as it caused a minor earthquake in which a 90-metre high clock had one of its needles disappear. A 14th century synagogue is well preserved in the Jewish quarter, next to El Grecho's recreated house. Toledo is an experience of a lifetime. Equip yourself with a tourist map, the *Es Madrid* magazine and *mucho gracias* for your travel whenever you can plan one in the future.

Fast forward, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said on Monday that current measures of lockdown will extend beyond April 25 and schools will be closed till September. Like elsewhere in Europe, he has announced a sector by sector opening of the economy. Sunday saw the smallest one-day death toll, 410, since March 22, which means the curve is bending.

(The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander IPKF South, Sri Lanka and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff.)

SOUNDBITE

When will India's poor wake up? You are dying due to starvation and it (Govt) is engaged in disinfecting the hands of the rich by making a sanitiser from your share of rice.



Congress leader
—Rahul Gandhi

In spite of contributing to the population boom, having three kids to be with is a treat. They are in all shapes and sizes. The day goes by being with them each for a couple of hours.



Actor
—Shah Rukh Khan

Trust us. The worst is yet ahead of us. Let's prevent this tragedy. This virus is dangerous. It exploits cracks between us when we have differences.



WHO chief
—Tedros A Ghebreyesus

Secularism and harmony are not political fashion but perfect passion for India and Indians. This inclusive culture has united the country with the fabric of unity in diversity.



Union Minister
—Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Environmental lessons

Sir — As we celebrate the Earth Day today, Percy Bysshe Shelley's quote, "Away, away, from men and towns; to the wildwood and the downs — to the silent wilderness; where the soul need not repress; its music lest it should not find; an echo in another's mind; while the touch of nature's art harmonises heart to heart," comes as a tight slap on the face of humanity. Earth Day is an annual event celebrated around the world on April 22 to demonstrate our support for the environment.

Every year, we come up with many resolutions to save planet earth but this year, the latter has itself found ways to rejuvenate. This year we celebrate this day when the Coronavirus pandemic has wreaked havoc in our lives and severely disrupted economies across the world. The outbreak of the virus has taught us that we should anticipate, evaluate and plan to deal with potential threats. If there was ever a time in which humanity should finally recognise that we belong to one connected family on earth, this should be it.

Srishi Mathur
Ujjain

Education system must adapt itself to changes

There is no need for us to fret about the academic year during the pandemic. It is time for our teaching community to rise to the occasion and handle the situation to the best of their ability. They should desist from holding online examinations as it may lead to some dissatisfaction in the student community. Exams can be conducted in the month of July and the consequent slight delay in university admissions is tolerable, given the prevailing conditions.

India is no stranger to such delays and has the experience to handle similar situations in the past. In the 70s, during the JP movement days, strikes in colleges and universities were the norm. During those years, our universities used to normally remain closed for two to three months in a year with students protesting against conducting certain examinations. The universities used to hold those exams later. However, our teaching system or students never suffered academically in any way.

With times changing, we should adopt some modifications. Online-centric education, which is currently being sought as an alternative to holding classes, will drive the learning process forward. It is my sincere request to all universities, schools, junior colleges that they refrain from



fee hikes and collect only tuition fees. Give your students more time to pay them, or pay in instalments and don't constrain them with a deadline. Some years from now, you will not be remembered on the number of graduates you have produced or the courses you have offered during this academic year. You shall be remembered for the way you responded to this pandemic.

Ravi Teja Kathuripalli
Hyderabad

Clouds of suspicion

Sir — The Modi Government has sought to look at an entire era prior to 2014 through different prisms — one of negation of policies and ethos of governance and the other by suspect-

ing the decisions made by the previous Government. If the former clouded the socio-political canvas, the latter disrupted the economic base.

The approach that worked for the Government during the fair run of the economy, not to speak

of electoral dividends, is now proving a millstone. If the post-demonetisation period was not enough, the spread of Coronavirus has made matters worse.

For three years now, Public Sector Units (PSUs) have enough liquidity but officials went into a

shell when it came to lending. The Finance Minister, who had exhorted the PSUs to lend without any fear of inquisition, has not since followed up on this with clear directives.

Ministers, Secretaries and officials continue to be under relentless eyes for the decisions taken by their offices. Add to this the ongoing extraordinary course of the economy, which demands a spurt in lending across sectors, big, medium, small and at the individual level. Clouds of suspicion are not known to bear rains.

R Narayanan
Navi Mumbai

Welcome decision

Sir — It was good to learn that labourers, who are stranded due to the ongoing lockdown, will be allowed to go to their respective places of work within a State. In doing so all social-distancing norms must be followed. Buses must be sanitised to avert any further spread of the disease.

Purna Agrawal
Via email

Send your feedback to:
letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

Learn to be Earth stewards

The 'conquest of nature' has got us to the precipice of doom as environmental degradation is the gravest threat to human life, second only to nuclear war



INDRA SHEKHAR SINGH

April 22 will be a historic day for the national Capital and perhaps, the world, for it shall be the cleanest Earth Day, since 1970. John McConnell, creator of Earth Day, may be smiling in heaven finally, due to the lack of noxious clouds and vapour trails. The increased oxygen might have made the angels slightly euphoric too. But cosmic events aside, can we conserve our planet? As we introspect, it is clear that the "conquest of nature" has got us to a precipice of planetary doom as environmental degradation is the gravest threat to human life, second only to nuclear war. It has very serious geopolitical consequences. Noam Chomsky recently on *Democracy Now* said that India and Pakistan, may go to nuclear war over shrinking water resources. Overall the roast is cooked and the Earth cannot take more violence. Pandemics and diseases are corrective reminders from nature, that it is time to steer away from our ecologically-destructive design and recreate a new economy and a new world.

How can we create a new world? Do we renounce the material world and choose a life devoid of technology? No. The Coronavirus provides us with an opportunity to reduce mindless consumption and reimagine a new paradigm, where the air is healthy and waterbodies are clean. To survive climate change and extinction, we need to adopt five principles: Reduce, Reuse, Regenerate, Swadeshi and Agro-ecology. We need a strong "green economy" (non-polluting, circular, renewable-based) to rebuild India and the world. For most part of the last century, technology has been used to destroy the Earth, we have to bridge the two now. The Industrial Revolution 4.0 needs to be built on a "green economy." But where does this path begin? We begin this journey by bringing "Earth awareness" into our lives. The Earth is alive, she is not merely dirt, or water or mountains to be mined. We have to reconnect with our land, mountains and rivers. We have to respect it.

Once this consciousness fills us, the next step is to reduce our imprint on this planet. Each action or product we buy/use has an impact on this Earth. Yet all our parameters of success — big houses, many cars and so on are ecologically lopsided. Reducing water, fossil fuel and electricity consumption, is not only "smart" but economical too. We need to get off the consumption bandwagon and fossil fuel economy to discover alternatives. A very simple way to reduce consumption is to reuse things. One can start by reusing gallons of RO outlet water for plants or washing dishes, or converting old clothes into blankets. India is filled with innovative ideas of reusing and recycling things.

Discarding two negative patterns of consumption definitely adds up to one big environmental positive. Humans are not masters of the world, but in the words of the renowned American conservationist Aldo Leopold, mere "stewards of the land." This land we have received from our ancestors, but only borrowed it from our descendants. And carbon reductionism, viewing actions/climate action in terms of their carbon footprint only, is not the only solution. We have to take the positive and holistic approach of regeneration versus an isolated negative outlook of carbon reductionism. Our efforts should not be to replace the fossil-fuel-economy with bio-fuels, or low carbon tech but reinvent the economy and our lives, with regenerative principles of creation.

Mahatma Gandhi outlined the solution for us. He called it Swadeshi economy. This is a system is based on self-sufficiency, dignity and local co-operation, while having minimal or a positive impact on the environment. This economy was a decentralised system of production, which shared surpluses and took from other what it could not produce. It is about time we accept a Swadeshi 2.0 in India, aided by ecological technologies. Before you buy something ask yourself can I replace this, with something as good made locally or sustainably?

Now for the final pillar of this pledge: Agro-ecology. Industrial food systems including cattle and poultry farms have destroyed human health and lives. Farmers suicides, cancer, foreclosures of small farmers, abuse and crime in rural communities all around the world are mere symptoms of a rabid production system. Our rivers are polluted with fertiliser and pesticides run-off and the consumer family is experiencing a plethora of diseases. But is agro-ecology viable? Scientist ML Jat has proved so. Agro-ecology does not only provide healthier food, but the practice reduces chemicals and fossil fuels in our food system. It has provided eco-system services by cleaning waters, sequestering carbon, normalising the nitrogen cycles and flavourful food. So where can we begin? Start at your own home, grow a garden with veggies or plant herbs like coriander in a pot, but remember without chemicals. Reach out to a farmer who can grow food agro-ecologically for you. The culmination of these principles is the foundation of a green economy. As the world has descended into economic darkness, India needs to emerge from the ashes of a broken economic and industrial system to embrace it. On this Earth Day we need to embark on the path of science, resilience and the Earth.

(The writer is Director, Policy and Outreach, National Seed Association of India)

THE GOVERNOR OF MARYLAND DIDN'T REALLY UNDERSTAND THE LIST. HE DIDN'T NEED TO BUY 500,000 TESTING KITS FROM SOUTH KOREA. —US PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP



I HAVE A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT'S GOING ON. AND I APPRECIATED THE INFORMATION PROVIDED BY (TRUMP'S) TEAM, BUT HE WASN'T THERE FOR IT. —GOVERNOR OF MARYLAND LARRY HOGAN

The revivalist surge

The Tablighi Jamaat is often considered extremely orthodox in its interpretations of Islam, with the ability to convert Muslims into radical believers



PRASHANT TEWARI

The Tablighi Jamaat (society of preachers) was founded by a Deobandi Islamic scholar, Muhammad Ilyas al-Kandhlawi, in Mewat, India, in 1926 with the objective of establishing a group of dedicated preachers as a Muslim revivalist society, who could reclaim "true" Islam, which he felt was not being practised by many Muslims across the world.

The slogan Kandhlawi coined for his new organisation captured the essence of its activities — "O Muslims, become true Muslims." By the mid-1930s, the Tablighi Jamaat had a programme of belief, which included, beyond the five pillars of Islam and Islamic doctrinal tenets the following: Islamic education; modest Islamic dress and appearance; rejection of other religions; high regard for Muslims (yet allowed to operate in India since 1947); propagating Islam; self-financing of Tablighi trips; lawful means of earning a living and strict avoidance of divisive and sectarian issues.

The Tablighi Jamaat is often considered extremely orthodox in its interpretations of Islam, with the ability to convert Muslims into radical believers. They believe that the Prophet Mohammed has commanded all Muslims to convey the message of Allah to the world and the Tablighis take this as their solemn duty.

They divide themselves into small *jamaats* (societies) and travel frequently across the world to spread the message of Islam to Muslim houses. During this travel, they stay in local mosques. This free spread and the access to the remotest part of the country with ease has enabled them to meet vulnerable and deprived sections of the non-Muslim population in India.

Some fringe groups within the organisation are backed by the power of petro-dollars, the Inter Services Intelligence's (ISI) dirty money machine, the vast network of underworld don Dawood Ibrahim and other anti-national entities. These elements have converted a large section of the population in the last 70 years with ease and without coercion.

Radicalism and its role in acts of terror: Some Tablighi Jamaat followers have worked as allies of jihadi and sectarian organisations. However, once they joined militant organisations, they cut off their links with the Tablighis. However, over the years, the terror groups have used some of the Tablighi Jamaat congregations as recruitment camps. Some fringe elements in the Tablighi Jamaat have been sympathisers and supporters of jihadi organisations such as the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (Hum), the Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami, the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), the Al Qaeda and the Taliban.

As per WikiLeaks, "Some of the 9/11 al-Qaeda suspects detained by the US in Guantanamo Bay had stayed in the Tablighi Jamaat headquarters in Nizamuddin West, New Delhi years ago."

According to Pakistani security analysts and Indian investigators, HuM members, involved in the hijacking of Indian Airlines Flight 814 in 1999, were members of the Tablighi Jamaat.

The 2011 US investigation reports suggest that the Tablighi Jamaat had supported members of the Al-Qaeda to get visas and funds to travel from Pakistan.

SOME FRINGE GROUPS WITHIN THE ORGANISATION ARE BACKED BY THE POWER OF PETRO-DOLLARS, THE INTER SERVICES INTELLIGENCE'S DIRTY MONEY MACHINE, THE VAST NETWORK OF UNDERWORLD DON DAWOOD IBRAHIM AND OTHER ANTI-NATIONAL ENTITIES



el from Pakistan.

Saad, the new Khalifa: Born on May 10, 1965, Maulana Muhammad Saad is the *Amir* (chief) of the Tablighi Jamaat. He is the grandson of Maulana Muhammad Ilyas, who founded the Jamaat. Maulana Saad became the chief of the Tablighi Jamaat on November 16, 2015 and claims to have 100 crore followers in 214 countries.

This huge number includes almost three-four crore converts in western Uttar Pradesh (UP) that the Jamaat has successfully targeted in the last 70 years in connivance with the so-called secular political parties.

The Tablighi Jamaat has changed the religious landscape of UP, Bihar, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Kerala and Maharashtra extensively by targeting vulnerable and marginalised sections of the non-Muslim population allegedly aided by the secular ruling elite of India by creating a votebank for secular parties and in return, converting millions of citizens by exploiting weakness of Article 25(1).

This Article guarantees to every person and not merely to the citizens of India, the freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion.

The Tablighi Jamaat used its weapon extensively for the last 70 years by inviting many radical preachers and import of petro dollars to facilitate the growth of the Muslim population from less than seven per cent in 1947 to 14.5 per cent in 2011 to likely 16.8 per cent in 2021.

Furthermore, there are indeed some links between the fringe elements in the Tablighis and the world of jihad.

First, there is evidence of indirect connections between the group and the

wider radical/extremist Deobandi nexus composed of anti-Shiite sectarian groups, Kashmiri militants and the Taliban. As per Intelligence reports, Rohingyas residing in camps in different parts of the country have a direct link with the Tablighi Jamaat.

The Coronavirus pandemic 2019-2020: Amid the Coronavirus lockdown, patients from Nizamuddin were tested and found to be positive for the virus, which resulted in the Arvind Kejriwal Delhi Government registering an FIR against Kandhlawi for arranging a Tablighi Jamaat programme despite restrictions on such gatherings after March 16 at the Nizamuddin Markaz. The Tablighi Jamaat congregation took place between March 13 and 15 but over 2,000 people stayed back in the Markaz. They had sought help from authorities for vacating the premises on March 25. On March 31, an FIR was filed against Kandhlawi and others by the Delhi Police Crime Branch under Section 3 (the penalty for offence) of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 and Sections 269 (Negligent act likely to spread infection of disease), 270 (malignant act likely to spread infection of disease), 271 (disobedience to quarantine rule) and 120b (punishment of criminal conspiracy) of the IPC.

Later the police slapped the 304 charge (punishment for culpable homicide not amounting to murder) while the Enforcement Directorate has filed a money laundering case and the IT department is scanning the bank accounts and suspicious transactions of the Tablighi Jamaat.

Why Tablighi Jamaat antagonised their defence: Spitting and pelting stones have almost become weapons of war for the Tablighis. It makes one

question as to what can be the reason for this kind of deplorable behavior? According to some news reports, there have been protests against medical staff and resistance against going to hospitals is not related to COVID-19. Some of the issues cited by them are the Citizenship Amendment Act, the National Register of Citizens, Triple Talaq, Babri Masjid and so on.

Unfortunately, some parts of the community are still focussing on politics and discrediting the Government at any cost while the entire nation is combatting the national health emergency. The country must take the threat of the Tablighis as an eye-opener for future planning that must include a ban and seizure of assets. We must identify ancillary units of the Tablighi Jamaat so that they can be stopped from operating under different names. We must punish the traitors of COVID-19, immediately amend Article 25(1) so that the money and preachers from outside the country can be restricted in their operations (it is a national security threat), set up an expert committee to re-examine provisions under Article 25-30 in the Indian Constitution and give additional power to the police to identify and book anti-nationals. It is important that Deoband, Bareilly, Salafi ideologies managing the network of mosques in India must be brought under Government supervision and control just as the temples of India are supervised under the Religious Endowment Act, 1873. An absolute freedom in the name of religion and at the cost of the nation must be immediately curbed.

(The writer is Editor-in-Chief, Opinion Express and regular columnist with The Pioneer)

The jury is out on the performance of netas

While the Chief Ministers function as generals, the Prime Minister remains the supreme commander. The bottom line is that unless they show their leadership qualities, they will not be able to win the next elections



KALYANI SHANKAR

The time has come for State chieftains to show their leadership qualities in handling the Coronavirus pandemic after the lockdown ends and the country starts going about its business as usual.

The days ahead are crucial for the economy of the country as well as for our fight against the virus but there is a healthy competition among the Chief Ministers to excel in dealing with these issues.

It is heartening to note that most States have risen to the challenge and each Chief Minister is trying to tackle the pandemic in his/her unique

way. Their response has been quick and positive and they are leading from the front.

For instance, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has set up a committee of experts, including some Nobel laureates, to advise her on the relief measures to be taken in her State.

Similarly, Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot has shown that his "Bhilwara model" could be emulated by other States to contain the pandemic. The "Kerala model", too, has won praise from all around the country.

There are others like the Karnataka Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa, Telangana's Chandrababhan Naidu, Punjab's Captain Amarinder Singh and Odisha's Naveen Patnaik who have done a good job of handling the Corona crisis. Interestingly most of the non-NDA Chief Ministers have done quite well.

The Centre, too, has

realised the importance of some lockdown relaxations in sectors like agriculture and construction.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also left it to the States to decide about further relaxation of the shutdown guidelines as most of the Chief Ministers had told him during a video-conference with them that there was a need for a staggered lockdown exit as the economy was suffering.

The Chief Ministers will face huge challenges in their respective States after the lockdown ends in May. For them it is a double whammy. On one front they have to contain the pandemic and on the other they have to find resources to deal with the situation.

At the April 11 videoconference with the Prime Minister, most Chief Ministers of Opposition-ruled States expressed grave concern over lack of resources and depleting revenues, as well as the huge

slide in the economy.

A calibrated exit from the lockdown is needed because the revenues of the Centre and States have collapsed due to the shutdown and its extension. In fact, most States claim that they will not be able to meet their salary bills beyond April. They have sought special assistance from the Centre to sustain the battle against the Coronavirus.

For instance, Mamata Banerjee has demanded a national package of around six per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to counter the pandemic's impact and as relief for the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) sector.

The Punjab Chief Minister has demanded a three-month crop loan waiver. Gehlot has sought a Central relief package for his State's tourism and hospitality industry, MSMEs and all the weaker sections of society. Tamil Nadu has sought ₹4,000 crore for augmenting

health services. Others have demanded their Goods and Services Tax (GST) share immediately.

Pending Central assistance, some Chief Ministers have gone ahead and started to lift their States out of the mire with their own resources.

Kerala took the lead by announcing a ₹20,000 crore package to kick-start the economy. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath was one of the first to assure a guaranteed income to daily-wage labourers.

In Odisha, Naveen Patnaik has set up three fully-equipped COVID-19 hospitals and in Chhattisgarh, Bhupesh Baghel has ensured extra rations for all. The list of initiatives goes on.

On its part, the Centre has the big problem of finding resources to deal with the unprecedented crisis. The slide in the economy is a big worry as almost all the sectors, including civil aviation, manufactur-

ing, agriculture, infrastructure, travel and tourism have been impacted and it will need a huge stimulus to uplift the economy.

The Centre has to pump in at least four to five billion dollars urgently into the economy. It has so far provided only 0.8 per cent of the GDP as a stimulus and part of this is appropriated from existing State funds linked to construction labour and mineral development.

The Coronavirus has shown how unprepared India was to tackle a pandemic like this. Many States do not have adequate hospitals, enough healthcare personnel, medical equipment and testing kits.

By and large most States are depending on the Centre for the supply of testing kits and they can perform their duties well only when they get the equipment. Hence, improving the health sector is very important and must be done on a war

footing if we are to win this Corona war.

Then there is the agriculture sector. The Centre has relaxed the lockdown for farm labourers. But the States that are depending on the migrant labour from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and other States will have to ensure that they can retain the workers for the harvest season. Meanwhile, Punjab does not have gunny bags to pack the harvest in and Singh has written to Mamata to send them over speedily. This will benefit West Bengal's jute farmers and weavers.

On the whole, while the Chief Ministers function as generals, the Prime Minister remains the supreme commander. The bottom line is that unless they show their leadership qualities, they will not be able to win the next elections. The jury is out on their performance rating.

(The writer is a senior journalist)



TO REOPEN OR NOT TO REOPEN

There are social as well as economic reasons for wanting children to go back to school. But any decision must be based on evidence. For now, the more urgent questions than when schools will reopen are why and how. That is, not why people want children to return to school (which is clear enough) but why schools in May, June or September will be any safer — for pupils, their families and teachers — than they are now. (The Guardian editorial)

CAPSULE



Tata Motors extends commercial vehicles' warranty expiring in lockdown

New Delhi: Tata Motors on Tuesday said it has extended by two months the warranty period for all of its commercial vehicles which are expiring during the period of the lockdown. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Tata Motors has extended the warranty for its commercial vehicles customers worldwide, the company said in a statement. As part of the service extensions for the commercial vehicle customers, Tata Motors said it is providing two-month extension for free services previously scheduled during the lockdown period. Moreover, the company has also extended 'Tata Suraksha' annual maintenance contract for all those with an expiry during the period of lockdown.



Huawei India appoints David Li as CEO

New Delhi: Huawei Telecommunications India on Tuesday said it has appointed David Li as its Chief Executive Officer. He replaces Jay Chen who has been promoted to handle Asia Pacific level business role. "I am very excited to be given the opportunity to lead Huawei Telecommunications in India. As a global ICT solutions provider, we are committed to the strategic development of India's ICT industry and will continue to work with the Government, customers and ecosystem partners to bring future technological innovations," Li said in a statement. Li joined Huawei in 2002 and has experience of working in the India market, including in roles like vice president sales and vice president HR during different phases of his career. He was serving as CEO of Huawei Cambodia before returning to India to take on his new role. "In his new role, David will be responsible for overseeing all aspects of Huawei Telecommunications India's strategy, directions and operations in the country, ensuring its commitment as a strategic and reliable ICT (information and communications technology) partner in accelerating the digital visions of India," the statement said.

Spot gold markets remain shut due to nationwide lockdown: HDFC

NEW DELHI: Spot gold markets on Tuesday remained shut due to nationwide lockdown, according to HDFC Securities. "Spot gold markets in India remained shut due to countrywide lockdown to prevent spreading of COVID-19 virus infections," it said. In the international market, gold was trading with marginal gains at USD 1,693 per ounce, while silver was flat at USD 15.19 per ounce.

PE, VC investments in India may dip up to 60% in 2020 due to virus

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Private equity and venture capital investments in India may decline up to 60 per cent in 2020 due to COVID-19 pandemic, according to a report by consulting firm EY.

Fund raising activity, which typically influences future investments, has also gone "cold", if one were to look at March's data of private equity (PE) and venture capital (VC) funds having raised only USD 85 million, EY said in a statement.

In the past few years, fund raising activity has been touching record highs, and grew 28 per cent to USD 48 billion in

Fitch Solutions says RBI may cut interest rates by 75 bps

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is expected to cut interest rates by 75 basis points by March 2021 as monetary easing measures till now are insufficient to lift the economy reeling under the stress of the Covid-19 pandemic, Fitch Solutions said Tuesday.

"In the light of a widening interest rate corridor as well as other aggressive monetary easing measures by the RBI, we have revised our expectations to 75 bps worth of cuts by March 2021, which imply a repo rate of 3.65 per cent and a reverse repo rate of 3.00 per cent," it said.

On April 17, the RBI announced a range of additional liquidity enhancing measures aimed at supporting credit flow to the economy.

These measures included a 25 bps cut to its reverse repurchase (repo) rate to 3.75 per cent to lower the incentive for banks to park their surplus funds with the central bank.

The policy repo rate was left at 4.40 per cent.

"We believe that existing



On April 17, the RBI announced a range of additional liquidity enhancing measures aimed at supporting credit flow to the economy.

monetary easing measures are still insufficient to lift the economy out of the economic crisis brought about by the Covid-19 outbreak, and softening inflationary pressures will allow for the implementation of more easing measures," Fitch Solutions said in a note.

Other measures announced by the RBI on April

17 included targeted long-term repo operations (TLTRO 2.0) for an aggregate amount of Rs 50,000 crore. The funds availed by banks under TLTRO 2.0 will have to be invested in investment grade bonds, commercial paper, and non-convertible debentures of non-bank financial companies (NBFC), with at least 50 per cent of the total amount going to small and

medium-sized NBFCs and micro-finance institutions (MFI). In addition, banks have to make these investments within one month from receiving the funds from the RBI.

Also, it reduced the liquidity coverage ratio to 80 per cent, from 100 per cent previously and provided a special financial facility of Rs 50,000 crore to All India Financial Institutions (AIFIs) at the repo rate. Besides, an increase in the amount state governments can borrow was allowed by further increasing the ways and means advance (WMA) limit for states by 60 per cent on top of March 31 levels until September 30, up from a 30 per cent increase announced on April 1.

RBI also relaxed the 90-day non-performing asset (NPA) classification norms for accounts being granted the three-month loan moratorium announced on March 27. However, an additional loss provisioning of at least 10 per cent of the total of these accounts have to be made, to be phased over two quarters (quarters ending March and June 2020) at no less than 5 per cent per quarter.

Sensex tanks 1,011 pts as oil price crash sparks sell-off on global scale

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark Sensex on Tuesday sank over 1,011 points on heavy losses in banking, IT and auto counters as historic oil plunge brought more unease into markets already reeling from coronavirus crisis.

After hitting a low of 30,378.26, the 30-share index ended 1,011.29 points or 3.20 per cent lower at 30,636.71.

Similarly, the NSE Nifty plummeted 280.40 points, or 3.03 per cent, to 8,981.45.

IndusInd Bank was the top laggard in the Sensex pack, sinking over 12 per cent, followed by Bajaj Finance, ICICI Bank, Axis Bank, M&M, Tata Steel, ONGC and Maruti.

On the other hand, Bharti Airtel, Hero MotoCorp and Nestle India were the gainers.

According to traders, domestic market plunged following selloff in global equities as rout in crude market hit investor sentiment world over.

US benchmark oil West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude for May delivery recovered to USD 1.10 a barrel.

With space to store oil scarce, WTI for May delivery plunged to -USD 37.63 a bar-



According to traders, domestic market plunged following selloff in global equities as rout in crude market hit investor sentiment world over

rel ahead of Tuesday's close for futures contracts -- when traders who buy and sell the commodity for profit would have had to take physical possession of it. Brent crude contracts for June delivery was trading 20.30 per cent lower at USD 20.38 per barrel.

On Wall Street, stocks crashed after US oil prices turned negative on Monday for the first time ever. Bourses in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Tokyo and Seoul ended with significant losses. Stock exchanges in

Europe were also trading up to 2 per cent lower.

Further, concerns over mounting Covid-19 cases also kept investors jittery, traders said. The death toll due to the pandemic rose to 590, while the number of cases in the country climbed to 18,601.

Global tally of the infections has crossed 24.7 lakh, with over 1.70 lakh deaths.

The rupee, meanwhile, settled for the day lower by 30 paise at 76.83 (provisional) against the US dollar.



Milagrow to test robots at AIIMS to contain spread of COVID-19

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Consumer robotics firm Milagrow on Tuesday said two its robots will be tried at the advanced COVID-19 ward of AIIMS Delhi to contain the spread of the pandemic amongst doctors and healthcare workers.

The Milagrow iMap 9 is a floor disinfecting robot that can navigate and sanitize the floors without any human intervention. It destroys COVID spores on floor surfaces using sodium hypochlorite solution, as recommended by ICMR, Milagrow said in a statement. The Milagrow Humanoid ELF enables doc-

tors to monitor and interact with contagious COVID-19 patients remotely with no person-to-person contact, thereby significantly reducing the transmission risk, it added.

"Milagrow Floor Robot iMap9.0 & Milagrow Humanoid will be tried at AIIMS Hospital, New Delhi," AIIMS Director Randeep Guleria said.

Milagrow Robots is very happy to support AIIMS in its effort to fight the COVID-19 pandemic and will work closely to develop more products based on the feedback of actual conditions, Milagrow Founder Chairman Rajeev Karwal said.

Kia Motors to offer financial support to its dealers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Kia Motors on Tuesday said it has come up with various initiatives to financially support its dealer partners amid difficult business environment due to COVID-19 pandemic.

The company said it has formulated a programme to help its dealers steer through the challenging phase, which includes multiple initiatives to sustain and improve cash flow to the dealer partners.

The automaker said it would provide support in terms of interest cost of dealer stock, including vehicles in physical and transit stock.

Besides, unutilised dealer funds lying with the company have already been remitted back to their current accounts, it added.

Further, all the accepted service claims for warranty have been credited to the dealers' accounts, Kia Motors said.

Amul eyes 15 pc growth in turnover this fiscal despite COVID-19 crisis

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

GCMMF, which markets dairy products under Amul brand, expects its turnover to grow 15 per cent this fiscal year from Rs 38,550 crore in 2019-20 despite economic slowdown caused by the nationwide lockdown to control coronavirus outbreak.

The household consumption of milk and other dairy products is expected to rise and will compensate any temporary loss of sales caused by closure of hotels, restaurants and cafeterias (HoReCa segment) during the ongoing lockdown period, said R S Sodhi, the managing director of Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation Ltd (GCMMF).

"COVID-19 will not have any impact on demand of the food products. Our sales in value terms during this month are at par with the same month last year. The demand of some products has come down but at the same time sales of many

products have risen," Sodhi told PTI in an interview.

Asked about the outlook for this fiscal year, he said: "We expect our turnover to grow by 15 per cent." GCMMF clocked 17 per cent growth in its turnover at Rs 38,550 crore during the 2019-20 fiscal year.

On the current situation of its milk operation, Sodhi said, "Gradually things are settling

down." Regarding sales, he said the demand for fresh milk has declined by 8 per cent as hotels and restaurants are closed. "HoReCa segment contributes 12-15 per cent of the total demand. But, fall is less as household consumption of fresh milk and butter milk has increased."

Sodhi noted that sales of butter, ghee, paneer, cheese and milk powder have gone up in the range of 20-35 per cent as people are consuming more.

However, he pointed out the demand of ice-cream has fallen sharply by 85 per cent, while sales of cream and mozzarella cheese are down by 70 per cent and 50 per cent, respectively. Sodhi said the company has diverted the idle supply chain of ice-cream into distribution of other dairy products.

"Our milk procurement from farmers has increased by 15 per cent as unorganised players are not buying", he said.

Sale of butter, ghee, paneer, cheese and milk powder has gone up by 20-35% as people are consuming more



Gold jewellery retail industry to be credit negative: ICRA

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The coronavirus outbreak and the lockdown ahead of Akshaya Tritiya is a credit negative for the gold jewellery retail industry in the short term, according to Icria. Gold jewellery buying is considered auspicious during Akshaya Tritiya, which falls in the last week of April this year.

Over the last two years, the domestic gold jewellery retail industry has been affected by factors like weak consumer demand amid slowing economic growth, rapid rise in gold prices and faltering rural output, regulatory policy interventions and cautious lending environment, Icria said in a report.

"Given this background, the widened outbreak of COVID-19 and subsequent lockdown, ahead of the critical Akshaya Tritiya season is a credit negative for the gold jewellery retail industry in the short-term," it added.

Food insecurity rising even before Covid crisis: Report

PNS ■ PARIS

Food insecurity was on the rise last year and the coronavirus crisis is likely to further exacerbate the situation, according to the Global Report on Food Crises released Tuesday by the United Nations.

It found that 135 million people in 55 countries were in living in situations of acute food crises or outright humanitarian emergencies last year.

The increase by more than 20 million people takes it to a record level in the four years the report has been compiled.

Higher dependence on digital tools drives demand for telecom services

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The coronavirus-driven lockdown and social distancing measures have led to higher dependence on digital tools, driving demand for telecom services, and there is "miniscule" financial impact on service delivery given essential nature of communications offerings, according to Edelweiss.

However, the lockdown is expected to arrest 4G subscriber addition and churn while accelerating SIM-consolidation, Edelweiss said in its latest telecom sector update. Maintaining a positive stance on the sector, it however flagged specific but "distant" risks including possibility of a



prolonged economic slowdown eroding consumers' ability to spend, and the Indian telecom sector historically bearing disproportionate burden of government finances "which may continue in the current phase".

It noted that a paradigm shift in consumer behaviour is underway in the wake of the lockdown and social distancing measures, that are aimed at containing the spread of coronavirus.

"We argue this is leading to higher dependency on digital tools such as videoconferencing, collaborative applications, etc, thereby driving up demand for telecom services," Edelweiss said.

The lockdown has imploded data demand globally as more people are working from home than ever before and triggered an uptick in the consumption of online content.

Such changes are expected to spur data demand structurally, increasing the wallet share of telecom services.

"Besides, we expect the lockdown to have little financial impact as the classification of telecom services under essentials has ensured service continuity," it said.

McAfee India names Rahul Arora as Sales Director

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Security solutions firm McAfee on Tuesday said it has named Rahul Arora as Sales Director for its India and SAARC operations.

As a key part of the India leadership team, Arora will be responsible for leading the company's sales teams and technical experts to help drive the cloud security market within India, a statement said.

He will be instrumental in building a strong pipeline, ensuring solid sales execution, and drive customer relationships to achieve sustainable growth.

NSE cautions trading members about Zoom

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Leading stock exchange NSE has cautioned trading members about video conferencing app Zoom and cyber threats amid increased usage of the platform in the wake of nationwide lockdown to contain coronavirus pandemic.

Many organisations have switched to work-from-home due to outbreak of the pandemic with employees using online communication platforms, including Zoom, Microsoft Teams, for remote meetings and webinars.

It has been observed that some of these apps are not secured and are vulnerable to be exploited thus revealing users' identity, location or



content of the discussion, the National Stock Exchange (NSE) said in a circular.

The exchange requested all trading members to undertake appropriate actions as applicable to their environment.

To mitigate the threat, it has been advised that officials may refrain from using Zoom meeting for discussion involving sharing of classified or sensitive information, the exchange noted.

I-T dept sends e-mails to 1.72 lakh assesseees

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The income tax department has sent e-mails to 1.72 lakh assesseees, including start-ups, companies and individuals, who have outstanding tax demands as well as tax refunds asking them to provide an update on the payment.

Since April 8, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has been fast-tracking refund payments to help taxpayers in the COVID-19 pandemic situation and has till date issued nearly 14 lakh refunds involving an amount of over Rs 9,000 crore to various taxpayers including individuals, Hindu Undivided Families (HUFs), proprietors, firms, corporate, start-ups, and micro, small and medium enterprises



(MSMEs).

The CBDT in a statement said its e-mail seeking clarification from all those who are entitled to get tax refund but also have outstanding tax to pay cannot be misconstrued as harassment.

"An opportunity is provided by the department to the

assessee to either clear the demand or intimate the status of said demand to the I-T department. Invariably, such communication is made by the department by sending an e-mail to the assessee informing it of the quantum of outstanding demand and providing an opportunity to pay the

Since April 8, the CBDT has been fast-tracking refund payments to help taxpayers in the COVID-19 pandemic

demand or respond with evidence regarding payment of the same if already made, or update the status of any other action on it," it said.

The CBDT said that the assesseees are required to furnish details of the pending demand, whether it has been paid or has been stayed by any appellate/competent authority so that the department could keep the same in abeyance and do not deduct this amount from refund.

"Thus, following the existing procedure of recuperation of outstanding demand, similar

mails have also been sent to 1.72 lakh assesseees including start-ups to intimate to the I-T department, the status of the demand outstanding and whether it has been stayed by the competent authority so that appropriate action can be taken for release of refunds without delay to the start-up," it added.

The CBDT said these e-mails are part of the faceless communication and are auto-generated under Section 245 of the I-T Act in refund cases where there is any outstanding demand payable by the assessee.

World Earth Day

Lockdown, A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY to set things right



Lockdown called by several countries around the world as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic has, in many ways, healed the Earth. The world is getting healthier since there has been a reduction in air, water and other kinds of pollution. Environmental activists suggest that perfect plans from the government is the need of the hour to maintain the same, post lockdown, reports V SATEESH REDDY

Lockdown across the globe has brought a drastic reduction in the pollution levels of air, water and others. It helped Earth to heal from the wounds that humans have caused for years in the name of development. Recent reports revealed that air pollution levels have dropped to 71 per cent in Delhi. According to the World Health Organization, towards the end of March, Delhi witnessed a gradual decrease in air pollution from an unhealthy 91 micrograms per cubic meter to 26 micrograms per cubic meter. Even the Central Pollution Control Board of Environment Ministry said that there has been a 71 per cent decrease in nitrogen dioxide levels in the country.

With today being the 50th World Earth Day, environmental activists and various organisations are striving hard to help nature. On the occasion, *The Pioneer* spoke to a few environmental activists about the impact the lockdown has had on the planet and what's next.

P Narayana Rao, founder of Environment and People magazine, has been making people aware of climate crisis through his magazine since 1994. The monthly magazine explains how people are destroying the environment in the name of infrastructure and development. His magazine also lays down methods to follow to protect nature. Narayana Rao says, "It's been 50 years since the incep-

tion of World Earth Day in April 1970 and here we are today, still causing destruction to the Earth by overusing our natural resources. Former Prime Minister of India, late Mrs. Indira Gandhi started clean water and clean air Acts in the 1970s. During the 1992 Rio Conference, various things were discussed on how to tackle climate issues in the 21st century. Over the years, people have stopped caring about natural resources."

When asked if the unexpected lockdown is helping the earth, he shares, "According to my observation, lockdown benefits for the Earth are temporary. Right now, since there is no transport and a decline in human intervention, it has helped in reducing air and water pollution. The lockdown has also brought a stop to various activities across the world like Afforestation, Water treatment, among others. It has also stopped the Greta Thunberg climate crisis movement and is a set back for environment protection movements all over the world."

Ramu D, a techie, has been striving hard for years to reduce plastic usage by Hyderabadis by introducing various activities. He is gifting plants to people who give him plastic. Ramu shares, "It is a healing period for the Earth. It is an appreciable move by the Telangana government to extend the lockdown till May 7. It gives more time for the Earth to settle. We have all walked into this situation. We have seen an excessive usage of natural

resources for decades for unnecessary things. We never believed that a day would come where we have to go out wearing masks. This feels like the Earth is punishing us for our deeds. The government must take some necessary actions to maintain less usage of vehicles and others to help nature.

Decentralisation of development too, will help Hyderabad cure itself. Every year, we celebrate Earth Day by introducing various activities but this time around, this is not possible due to the lockdown. On Earth Day, we are planning to explain to people about minimal and thoughtful usage of our depleting natural resources."

Social activist G Kalyani has started the Swasa Foundation and is conducting various environmental awareness activities all over Hyderabad. She says, "This is a great opportunity for governments to introduce some plans to help the planet. Many studies revealed that the human brain takes more than 21 days to follow new changes. With more than 21 days of ockdown all over the country, it is the best time for our leaders to think about nature. The government can take new actions like limited vehicles permission, and others, post the lockdown to reduce pollution. Lockdown is definitely helping the nature revive itself. But I believe that it is a golden opportunity for our leaders to take any action towards helping the environment. If we don't take up action now, we are sure to be doomed."

According to my observation, lockdown benefits for the Earth are temporary. Right now, since there is no transport and a decline in human intervention, it has helped in reducing air and water pollution.

— P NARAYANA RAO

We never believed that a day would come where we have to go out wearing masks. The government must take some necessary actions to maintain less usage of vehicles and others to help nature.

— D RAMU

This is a great opportunity for governments to introduce some plans to help the planet. They can take new actions like limited vehicles permission, and others, post the lockdown to reduce pollution. Lockdown is definitely helping the nature revive itself.

— G KALYANI

In an exclusive conversation with V SATEESH REDDY, actor Lakshman Meesala shares about his struggles to enter the film industry, his inspiration, love for experiments, upcoming films and more

‘Love to take up experimental roles’

Telugu actor Lakshman Meesala has received appreciation from the film fraternity for his natural acting skills in movies like *RX 100*, *Falaknuma Das*, *George Reddy*, *Palasa* 1978 and more. Inspired by the legendary NTR, Lakshman came to Hyderabad in 2007 with a dream to someday, appear on the silver screen.

Inspired by NTR garu
Lakshman spent a lot of his time watching NTR's films in his childhood. He says, "I'm a very big fan of senior NTR garu and would watch all of his films. After my SSC, I came to Hyderabad to pursue a career in acting. I faced a lot of struggles to get movie offers. I worked under DS Deekshitulu sir for many years and

honed my acting skills. At the time, I got my first opportunity to act in the film *Ko Ante Koti* which was produced by Sharwanand. I later went on to do other films."

Acted in over 50 plays

Lakshman acted in more than 50 plays. "I acted in many plays and got good name and fame. I received the Bandi award for my acting in the play *Komaram Bheem*. For the role, I had to live in Nizamabad and other districts of Telangana to learn the slang," he reminisces.

Lacked skills of self promotion

Lakshman played key roles in movies like *RX 100*, *Palasa*, *George Reddy*, *Falaknuma Das*. He says he failed to use his good roles to promote himself because he lacked the skill of self promotion.

He adds, "*RX 100* was a very big hit and I played a key role in the film. Like *RX 100*, I got good roles in movies like *George Reddy*, *Palasa* and other movies. Even though I was part of good films, I failed to promote myself. I never cared about name and fame. All I knew was I had to prepare better for the next role for my next film."

Director SS Rajamouli was all praise for his role in the film *Manamantla*. He says, "Even though I played prominent roles in good films, I attended auditions for several other roles. Established actors usually don't do that, but I did. If the unit recognised my calibre they give me a role. If they don't, I go audition for the role."

Commitment for roles

One can recognise Lakshman with his typical long moustache and beard.

When asked about his look, Lakshman shares, "We need to maintain a particular look until we finish shooting for that role in the film. For one of my roles in a film, I had to sport a long beard and the film somehow got shelved. I maintained that look for quite a long time and lost some offers along the way, because of the long beard. But the okay, because everyone has to go through issues to emerge stronger and get to the top."

Love experimenting

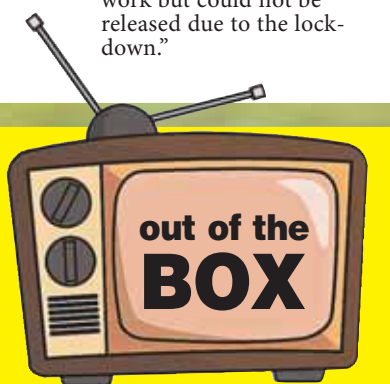
Lakshman says he loves to take up experimental roles. He adds, "I love experimental characters in movies and I believe that it takes some time for me to get to those roles. When a director approaches me with a role, I try to give it my best shot by improvising it. Theatre has more

scope for experimental characters than cinema. In movies, most of the experimental roles are designed for lead roles. I think it'll take me a while to get such roles. I love to play mythological roles because it is always a challenge to remember those dialogues. They also help us learn more about our history."

Upcoming films

About his upcoming movies, Lakshman shares, "At present, I'm working on a film called *Vanara*. It is an independent film. I'm also playing a small role in the film *Akasha Veedhullo*. In another film *Kanakam*, I'm playing the role of a youngster. The movie is all about three youngsters. My recent movie, *Yekam* has finished post-production work but could not be released due to the lockdown."

I love experimental characters in movies and I believe that it takes some time for me to get to those roles. When a director approaches me with a role, I try to give it my best shot by improvising it. Theatre has more scope for experimental characters than cinema. In movies, most of the experimental roles are designed for lead roles. I think it'll take me a while to get such roles. I love to play mythological roles because it is always a challenge to remember those dialogues.



Immunity-boosting, yet tasty veggies are the need of the hour

The one thing on the top of our minds today is the COVID-19 pandemic that has impacted communities around the globe. Everyday preventive measures — such as handwashing, avoiding contact with sick individuals, and good hygiene — can go a long way in reducing your risk for viruses, bacteria, and other pathogens.

However, scientific evidence suggests that nutrition and other lifestyle measures influence immune strength and susceptibility to infectious diseases.

However, for nuclear families, it is always a challenge to have fresh vegetables and fruits stocked up as most vegetables are simply not 'practical' to store in your regular refrigerator. Pumpkins are "too big", snake gourds "too long", bitter gourds are "too bitter". This leads to very predictable choices that may not serve the function of boosting

your immunity.

But what if we get a choice of having a pumpkin that fitted in the refrigerator or a snake gourd small-enough for one-time use and bitter gourds that are nutritious but not too bitter? What more?

Immunity boosting in these troubled times. "We want vegetables to be flavourful but, at the same time, available in a practical size and shape. This is one of the objectives set by our company founder Dutch seedsman and 2019 World Food Prize laureate Dr. Simon Groot," says Dilip Rajan, Managing Director of East-West Seed India, a Dutch-owned, tropical vegetable seed company.

"Take, Covai, our short snake gourd variety. Usually, a snake gourd is very long up to 1 meter or half long, which is 50 to 60 cm. Our variety is short and high yielding and produces snake gourds that are uniformly cylindrical, whitish-green, 24-28cm long with 200-300g weight. Perfect for a family of

four and one-time cooking. According to experts and reliable data, Snake gourd is a powerhouse of nutrients, vitamins, and minerals. Known as 'Padwal', it is an all-natural antibiotic and expectorant," adds Dilip Rajan.

Similarly, East-West Seed India has come out with small-sized cucumbers — Minhaaz 327 (12- 15 cm) and Muskan 395 (15 - 18 cm). "Cucumbers are often very long and bulky, making them difficult to store. Our varieties come in a very convenient size. Cucumbers are immunity boosters," he adds.

East-West Seed India has introduced Butternut pumpkins, which weigh just 450 gm to 700 gm and can be stored without refrigeration for an extended period. It is also famous for its variety of bitter gourds.

So what made East-West seed India think of coming up with varieties that are so personalised and convenient to use? Dilip Rajan replies, "In urban India, there has

been a gradual disintegration of the joint family system and the emergence of a 'nuclear family', with smaller households. This made us think about how we could rephrase our approach to making more nutritious vegetables available for large populations. Our approach to breeding is unique in that we look at highly specific local factors and breed particular varieties with those factors in mind. We do not believe in a "one-size-fits-all" approach — we look at our work as an investment in the success of farmers in these regions, and breeding seeds that will thrive in those areas is critical to that work."

The team is also working closely with several institutions across the country to work on the project.

The team plans to launch new varieties of Tomato, Okra, and Hot Pepper and will soon introduce innovative technologies beyond disease resistant and high yielding vegetable varieties.



Tips for eating more vegetables and fruits each day:

- Keep fruit at a conspicuous place in a presentable manner. Place several ready-to-eat washed whole fruits in a bowl or store chopped colorful fruits in a glass bowl in the refrigerator to tempt a sweet tooth.
- Explore and choose something new when you visit the supermarket or a Bazar. Variety and color

are critical to a healthy diet. On most days, try to get at least one serving from each of the following categories: dark green leafy vegetables, yellow or orange fruits, and vegetables; red fruits and vegetables; legumes (beans) and peas; and citrus fruits.

- Choose vegetables that are packed with different

- nutrients and more slowly digested carbohydrates.
- Try cooking new recipes that

include more vegetables. Salads, soups, and stir-fries of tasty vegetables are great ideas.



FUN

ARCHIE



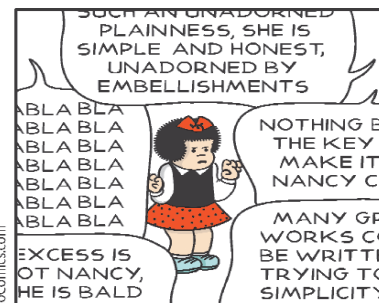
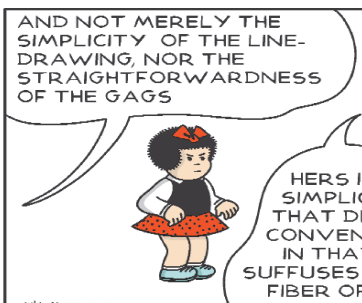
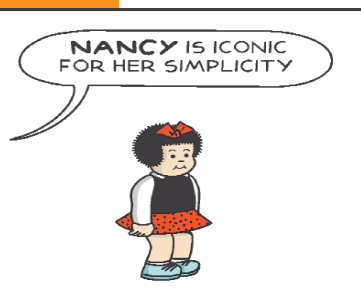
CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



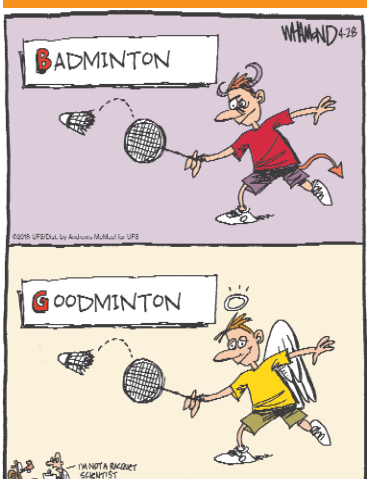
NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



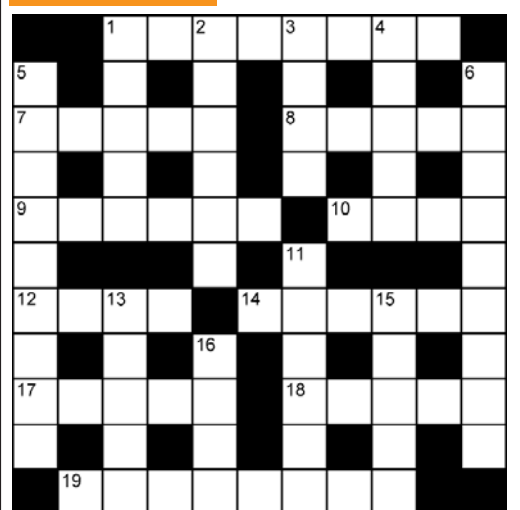
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- A three-sided figure
- Shovel
- A compass direction
- Coming to a finish
- Something worn on a foot
- Shove
- A skateboard has these
- Precise
- Water vapour
- A blown musical instrument

DOWN

- Bronze medal place in a race
- Toddler
- Smell with this



SUDOKU

	1	5		4				
		2						9
	8				2			4
2		6			9			
1			2		4			6
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7			1					8
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Yesterday's solution								
5	9	2	1	7	3	8	6	4
4	7	1	8	6	9	3	5	2
6	3	8	2	5	4	1	9	7
1	4	9	3	2	7	5	8	6
8	5	7	4	9	6	2	1	3
2	6	3	5	1	8	7	4	9
7	8	6	9	3	1	4	2	5
3	1	5	6	4	2	9	7	8
9	2	4	7	8	5	6	3	1

Rules

- Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.
- The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.

CA chief hints five match Test series against India

IAN S ■ BRISBANE

Cricket Australia CEO Kevin Roberts has expressed the board's desire to host a five match Test series against India later this year. India's tour of Australia currently consists of four Tests and three ODIs, however, Roberts has hinted that there could be an additional Test in the series when Virat Kohli and company reach their shores in November.

Termining their relationship with the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) as 'strong', Roberts said a five match Test series is a possibility but not a certainty at this stage.

"There's no certainty about that (five match Test series) for the coming season, but what I can say is that the relationship between the BCCI and Cricket Australia is really strong," Roberts told reporters on a video call.

"We've discussed a shared desire to evolve to five match Test series between Australia and India in the future."

"It's something we've both committed to in principle in the future, the big question is whether or not we can bring that in before the next future tours cycle in 2023."

"We don't know what prospect there is of that next sea-



Rishabh Pant, left, plays a shot in front of Tim Paine on day 2 during their fourth Test in Sydney

AP/File Picture

son, but certainly with a changing landscape...we won't rule out a possibility of that until we get closer to the time," he added.

Roberts also revealed the board is looking at the prospect of hosting all the matches at a single venue in their bid to keep the players and staff safe amid coronavirus pandemic.

"We won't rule anything out in terms of the Indian series. Along with the BCCI and Indian players, we want to stage a

series that inspires the cricket world, whether or not there are people in the stands," Roberts said.

"We need to face into all possibilities. Fortunately, we have a little bit of time to work out the scenarios," he added.

DEFENDS PAY CUT

Cricket Australia CEO Kevin Roberts also defended the salary cuts of staff as he highlighted the precarious financial

position the board is currently in due to the coronavirus pandemic.

With no cricket being played, Roberts stated pay cuts are necessary to keep CA financially stable.

"In pre-coronavirus world, we were already projecting that our cash and investments would reduce to about \$40 million at the start of September this year," Roberts told journalists.

"The unfortunate reality

Gavaskar proposes T20 WC swap between Ind & Aus

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

In a bid to reduce the effect of coronavirus crisis on world cricket, former India captain Sunil Gavaskar has come up with a solution with respect to the T20 World Cup that is scheduled to be held in Australia later this year.

"At the moment, as we all know, Australia has barred foreigners from entering the country till the 30th of September. The tournament is starting from mid-October or the 3rd week of October, so it's looking a bit difficult at the moment," Gavaskar was quoted as saying by *India Today*.

The legendary India opener suggested that India can host the T20 World Cup in 2020 while Australia can host the next edition, which is originally slated to be held in India next year. This is contingent to coronavirus threat

being minimalist in the India

"If it can be done... next year's T20 World Cup is in India. If it can be done... where India and Australia come to an agreement... in case the curve in India flattens out and India and Australia swap... so the T20 World Cup is in India in October-November this year and Australia in October-November next year, then it can happen," he said.

Gavaskar also batted for the 13th edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL) to be held just before the T20 World Cup, so that players get enough match practice before the multi-national event.

"If it is going to happen that way, then maybe what can happen is the IPL can be held just prior to the T20 World Cup so that it's enough practice for the players to have T20 World Cup," Gavaskar said.

of that is that we're estimating that we've taken a \$20 million loss thus far. We have to anticipate that there will be more risks than that \$20 million.

"If you contemplate the prospect of the international season, in particular, being affected, we have an issue of hundreds of millions of dollars on our hands," he added.



Enjoyed how SA competed as a young bowling attack: Langeveldt

CAPE TOWN: South Africa bowling coach Charl Langeveldt believes there have been some decent players who have progressed through the ranks over the past season, highlighting the fact that talent was evident within the domestic structures.

The likes of Anrich Nortje and Janneman Malan enjoyed breakthrough performances during a challenging summer in which the national team went through a serious transition in the form of a new coaching set-up, as per a report on Cricket South Africa official website.

Graeme Smith, the recently appointed full-time Director of Cricket, brought in a new Team Director in Mark Boucher and a whole new coaching team back in December on the eve of their marquee tour against England.

"It's been an interesting time coming back from Bangladesh," he was quoted as saying by *www.cricknet.co.za*.

"It's always nice to coach your country. I think when it came to making the deal back then, Jacques Faul (Chief Executive Officer) and Graeme Smith were brilliant behind the scenes making it possible for the transfer to come through to South Africa. The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) were also excellent and they were brilliant in releasing me."

"It was never going to be easy. We (the new coaching staff) started with the Test series against England in December and we didn't have enough time as a team to gel."

"England being England and having a settled team with guys who have played a lot more Test cricket together than us, we had a lot of youngsters coming into the team and into the set-up, that was really hard."

"The guys played well in patches but as a unit we just couldn't get it together. We got better in the limited-overs tours. Lungi Ngidi was excellent, Temba (Bavuma) and Quinny (Quinton de Kock) were also

good. Against Australia, Lungi again with the ball was fantastic and then Janneman was outstanding. Overall we were a lot better."

Langeveldt was brought into the set-up from his position as Bangladesh bowling coach.

Despite opting to rest senior players in the white-ball contests, South Africa still managed to pull their weight and compete, something that former Proteas quick Langeveldt relished.

"I really enjoyed how we competed as a young bowling attack at an international level," he beamed. Anrich, Lungi, (Lutho) Sipamla, (Tabraiz) Shamsi, they all stepped up very well."

"All-round everyone chipped in. Where we came from starting in December and where we ended up, I think CSA can be really proud of what they did on a domestic level to get these players through. That's where these players come from and they showed a lot of maturity which is a big plus for us going forward."

Langeveldt added that there is plenty more potential in the domestic cupboard, something the national coaching team were meant to explore during the final weeks of April.

However, with COVID-19 striking, that has been placed on hold. "We are looking around for the up and coming fast bowlers," the coach added. "We were supposed to have a camp starting on April 19 for six days, but that had to be cancelled because of the virus, but we are definitely looking because you always have to have replacements. There have been a few names that have popped up, Lifa Ntanz, Gerald Coetzee, there's Glenton Stuurman, Stefan Tait and then obviously Lutho Sipamla, who have been brilliant in the national set-up."

"So there's a few out there and these are the guys that will be the back-up for the national team and they are the ones we want to see." IAN S

I try to play like Sachin sir: Shaw

IAN S ■ MUMBAI

Young India opener Prithvi Shaw on Tuesday said 'idol' Sachin Tendulkar has advised him to always play his natural game and stay calm off the field.

In an *Instagram Live* chat with his Indian Premier League franchise Delhi Capitals, the 20-year old who is the youngest Indian to score a Test century on debut, said: "He has had a big influence on me. I first met him when I was eight. He always tells me to play my natural game and according to the situation. Off the field also, he asked me to stay calm."

Shaw, who was part of the two Tests in New Zealand recently where he opened the batting with Mayank Agarwal in the absence of Rohit Sharma, said Tendulkar had once asked him not to change his grip.

"I am bottom-hand play-

er and Sachin sir had asked me not to change my grip. I was young and I used to change my grip as per coaches' advice. But after Sachin sir told me, I did not change my grip."

In September 2017, at 17, Shaw became the youngest player to score a century on Duleep Trophy debut, a record previously held by Tendulkar.

Commenting on the constant comparison with the legend, Shaw said: "There is pressure when people compare me to him. But I take it as a challenge. I try to play like him. He is the God of cricket."

Commenting on his experience of working with BCCI President Sourav Ganguly who was earlier mentor with DC, Shaw said: "There have been experiences to be honest and he helped a lot as he knew how to motivate youngsters in the team. It was great."

Don't see any cricket being played for next one year: Akhtar

IAN S ■ LAHORE

Former Pakistan speedster Shoaib Akhtar has said he doesn't see cricketing activities taking place for the next 12 months as the entire world battles with COVID-19 pandemic.

"If you ask me honestly, I don't know for how long the coronavirus outbreak will last, until and unless it is not known that how many people are infected, one cannot go ahead with any kind of cricket anywhere," Akhtar said on his *YouTube* channel.

"I do not see cricket being played for at least



a year due to the coronavirus. I see the virus troubling us for one year, these are troublesome times and I just hope we come out of this

stronger," he added. The *Rawalpindi Express* is also off the view that whenever cricket resumes, use of saliva for shining the cricket ball should not be

allowed so as to stop the spread of the virus.

"I don't think that one can apply saliva on the ball now, we as bowlers apply saliva on the ball to make the ball shinier, the ball goes in the hands of everyone on the park, I saw a report of the ICC which said that bowlers would not be able to apply saliva on the ball, Akhtar said."

"Cricket is a game which requires contact, if ICC is thinking about passing the law related to applying saliva on the ball, then I welcome the decision keeping coronavirus in mind," he added.

LaLiga, RFEF hope to restart season by May end

IAN S ■ MADRID

The Spanish Football League (LaLiga) and the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) have announced an agreement to try and finish the current league season, which has not seen any games since March 8 due to the health crisis triggered by the coronavirus pandemic.

The two organizations held an 8-hour meeting at the offices of the Spanish government's Superior Sports Committee on Monday and have agreed to return to training "when the sanitary conditions permit, and under strict health protocols."

Spanish media reports state that depending on government guidelines and permission, players could return to individual training in the middle of May, with group sessions a week or two weeks later. All players would be tested for the coronavirus.

The aim is then to restart the competition on either the last weekend in May, or the first weekend in June and attempt to play two matches a week.

The matches would be played in empty stadiums with no supporters allowed and there is also a chance that some clubs may opt to hold their fixtures in their training grounds.

Marca and *Diario AS* both report that Real Madrid are considering playing their matches at the Alfredo Di Stefano Stadium at their Valdebebas training complex in the outskirts of Madrid.

Monday's meeting also saw the RFEF and LaLiga agree to set up a contingency fund of 10 million Euros to help smaller clubs which could need financial aid because of the crisis.

Euro 2020 playoffs in Oct-Nov: UEFA

WASHINGTON: UEFA vice president Sándor Csányi says playoffs to decide the last four places in the postponed European Championship could be played in October or November.

The 16-nation playoffs have twice been postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Csányi tells Hungarian media that October and November are options while there is uncertainty about when football can resume in Europe. All 55 UEFA member countries are currently scheduled to play Nations League games in October and November.

Hungary was drawn to play at Bulgaria in the single knockout Euro 2020 playoffs. The winner will host either Iceland or Romania with a place in the final tournament at stake. AP

Utd to beat Liverpool for Sancho's signature: Redknapp

IAN S ■ LONDON

Former Liverpool midfielder Jamie Redknapp fears arch-rivals Manchester United are set to beat his former club for the signing of Borussia Dortmund forward Jadon Sancho.

The 20-year-old Englishman is currently one of the most sought-after players in European football and Redknapp believes Sancho will end up in Premier League sooner than later with the Red Devils in pole position to snap the hot

shot winger.

"I think it is a matter of time with Jadon Sancho coming to the Premier League. We are talking about a genuine superstar. A player that can do incredible things with the ball. Played 70 odd games in the Bundesliga, scored 27 goals from a wide area which is very good," Redknapp told *Sky Sports*.

"We have missed out on the likes of the Neymar in the Premier League but he can come and really light it up. Personally I would call it. He will be a great signing for whoever he goes to."

"I would like to see him at Liverpool, but I think he is going to end up at United though," he added.

Since making the move to Bundesliga from Manchester City in 2017, Sancho's rise has been nothing but meteoric. In the last two seasons for Dortmund, Sancho has scored 20 goals and assisted 28 times for the German giants.



Barcelona's Camp Nou stadium

UEFA/Twitter

Barca offer Camp Nou naming rights

AFP ■ BARCELONA

Barcelona will raise money for the fight against coronavirus by selling the naming rights to their Camp Nou stadium next season for the first time in the club's history.

The income generated from the re-naming of Barca's 99,000-seater home for one year will be put towards "research projects and other projects involved in the battle against the effects of COVID-19, both at a local and international level."

The stadium will keep 'Camp Nou' in its name

while also including the new sponsor.

The club have previously advertised UNICEF children's charity for free on their shirts.

In a statement on Tuesday, the club said the process of finding a buyer will begin "in the next few weeks."

"The income generated will create a fund that will be divided in the following way: a part will go towards a project on COVID-19 driven by the sponsors themselves and the rest will be shared out amongst other projects that are being developed in parallel," the statement added.

Davies extends Bayern deal

AFP ■ MUNICH

Talented Canadian teenager Alphonso Davies says it is a "dream come true" to extend his Bayern Munich contract until 2025.

Davies is the latest Bayern star offered an extension after Mueller and Flick both recently signed new contracts until 2023.

Davies, 19, was originally signed until June 2023, but the versatile teenager has impressed this season, both on the left wing and at left back.

"I'm very happy. Bayern Munich is one of the best clubs in the world, and for me it's a dream come true to play here," Davies said in a statement.

"I want to win as many titles as possible with this club."

"The mentality of always wanting to win everything is in FC Bayern's DNA."

He joined the German giants from Vancouver Whitecaps in 2019, but has made the breakthrough to Bayern's first team this season by starting 17 of Munich's 25 league games and made his Champions League debut.

"Alphonso has developed very well at FC Bayern and has earned this contract extension with his impressive performances," said Bayern chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge.

"We are happy that he will remain in the long term."

AFP ■ MUNICH



AFP ■ MADRID

Rafael Nadal on Monday expressed his frustration that tennis players remain unable to practise due to the coronavirus pandemic, while Roger Federer revealed he was happy with his recovery from knee surgery.

The Spanish government has extended the country's state of alarm until May 9, with the entire population confined to their homes except a small number working in specific sectors, leaving Nadal perplexed as to why he can't train.

"It's true I don't understand very well because we cannot play tennis when many

people are going to work and even more so in our sport, where we keep at a large and safe distance and we play on opposite sides of the court," world number two Nadal said during an *Instagram Live*.

Nadal treated tennis fans to an *Instagram Live* in which he spoke to both Roger Federer and Andy Murray about their experiences during lockdown.

"I am not playing tennis, I do not have a court at home and I miss it a little," Nadal said.

"I am sticking to my physical routines. From the gym of my academy they were able to bring me some machines when lockdown began so I try to work a little in the morning, a little in the afternoon."

"It is very important to have both the head and the body focused and it is what I am trying to do at all times."

Federer meanwhile gave an update on his right knee after the 20-time major winner decided to undergo surgery in February.



"I've been hitting a bit against a wall, (doing) rehab with the knee," Federer said.

"It's OK, I had a really good first six weeks, then it was a bit slower, now it's getting better again but I have plenty of time."

"There is no stress, no rush. If there is anything positive (about being in lockdown) that's the only thing really. I just want the knee to be good, it doesn't matter when I return."

All WBO activities suspended till June 15

SAN JUAN: The World Boxing Organisation (WBO) has suspended all activity till at least June 15 due to the global coronavirus pandemic. Additionally, its annual convention scheduled for October is also in doubt.

Apart from applying to the release of rankings and administrative actions, the suspension also applies to all fights in this period. WBO President Francisco Valcarcel said that the decision has been primarily taken due to restrictions on social gatherings that are in place in most countries around the world.

"I think the fans are an essential part of boxing," Valcarcel told *ESPN*. "Even if

boxing is a TV event, the fights that are of most interest to the public, I don't think we'll be able to see them this year, at least not until we can have fans."

Valcarcel admitted that he has his doubts on whether any fights will take place in August or September. "For us to have fans, we need a vaccine — it's a complicated thing. They say they might be able to fight in August or September, but I have my doubts. We must sacrifice money or time waiting on a vaccine."

"Promoters are going to have to give up money if they want to do it before that," he said. IAN S

Right thing to criminalise match-fixing menace: Zaheer Abbas

KARACHI: Pakistan great Zaheer Abbas on Tuesday said corruption has been there in Pakistan cricket for far too long and has damaged the sport as much in the country as the 2009 attack on the Sri Lankan team.

The Pakistan Cricket Board has asked the government to frame a law that would criminalise match-fixing and spot-fixing in cricket.

"It is the right thing to do for the Pakistan board because for too long, we have been soft while dealing with corruption cases and these have led to a string of scandals which badly damaged our image and also hurt our cricket's progress," Abbas said.

"If the militant attack on the Sri Lankan team bus dealt a big blow to Pakistan cricket as we were forced to play away from home, these corruption scandals have not been less damaging to our cricket over the years," he added.

Asked to comment on that, he said: "In the end it is Pakistan cricket which suffered as we lost good players and more importantly we sent out the wrong message to cricketers and even those who try to lure, entice and corrupt players."

Abbas said no one should be spared as corruption is the worst thing a cricketer can do.

"I say spare no one because this is the worst thing a cricketer can do to his country, team and sports," Abbas said.

"I have already spoken to the government about this because other cricket playing nations like Australia, New Zealand, Sri Lanka have enacted laws that make match-fixing a criminal offence," PCB chairman Ehsan Mani said.

The PCB had closely followed the procedure adopted by the Sri Lankan board, Mani said, while legislating its law against match-fixers.

Recently, former Pakistan captain and decorated commentator Ramiz Raja has said tainted players like left-arm pacer Mohammed Amir should not be allowed to play.

Pakistan batting great Javed Miandad had also said that cricketers involved in match-fixing should be hanged. IAN S

Actor-turned-filmmaker Srinivas Avasarala will be spearheading it as the lead, while relatively new faces will form the supporting cast, finds

NAGARAJ GOUD



Neelakanta's Show gets a sequel

More than 17 years after its release, director Neelakanta's Show, which won the National Award for Best Telugu Feature and for Best Screenplay, is set for a sequel, *The Pioneer* has learnt. Actor-turned-filmmaker Srinivas Avasarala will be spearheading it as the lead, while relatively new faces will form the supporting cast.

Neelakanta, who has been keeping a low profile in Telugu cinema of late, will be directing the sequel from his own script, while Sri Ranjith Movies chief Damodar Prasad is tipped to produce it. Avasarala tell us exclusively, "It is titled *Second Show* and like the first part, will be a pure drama predominantly. We were supposed to start it sometime back but because of Covid-19 outbreak, we couldn't meet and discuss our plans on how to take it forward. It's there on the cards but not sure

when it will go in front of the cameras."

Second Show is the actor's third successive signing as a lead actor in the recent past. Besides wrapping up 90 per cent of *Nootokka Jillala Andagaadu* (NJA), which he has written, he has also completed a major part of *NRI-Nayana Rara Intiki*, with director Bala Rajasekharuni. Once the shooting restrictions are lifted, he will dive into the shooting of NJA, directed by his protégé Rachakonda Vidyasagar, and complete it, before shifting atten-

tion to other acting assignments. Then there is *Palana Abbai Palana Ammai*, which he is directing. Starring Naga Shaurya, Malavika Nair and Akanksha Sharma, it's an intense love story. A foreign schedule awaits it.

On the other hand, Neelakanta, who prefers the road less travelled by with his choice of stories, has recently completed the filming of the Malayalam remake of Hindi super hit, *Queen*.

Direct OTT release of Nishabdham is not true: People Media Factory

Rumors about the makers of Anushka-starrer *Nishabdham* toying with the idea of releasing the film directly on streaming platforms have been doing the rounds for the past one week. With the film deferred from the release date of April 2 due to lockdown, the interests have piled up, causing a financial headache to the producers, it was being said. Buzz also had it that the actress was averse to the idea, rather wanting the film to make it to theatres first.

In the wake of rumours flying thick and fast, the makers issued a statement on Monday, saying that Anushka was a pillar of supporting to them throughout the good and bad times. "From the day 1 of shoot till date, our stars and technicians have been a pillar of support to us through good and bad times, especially Anushka Shetty garu. Please do not believe in any baseless rumours you come across. If there is any major development, we shall announce it officially," production house People Media Factory said in a statement.

Also featuring Madhavan, Anjali, Shalini Pandey, Subbaraju and Avasarala Srinivas and popular Hollywood actor Michael Madsen in key roles, *Nishabdham*, shot completely in the US, is a horror-thriller.



This is the best time for a writer: Swaroop RSJ

Filmmaker Swaroop RSJ, who debuted with the much-loved *Agent Sai Srinivasa Athreya* last year, is utilising the lockdown period to watch shows, write and cook. "I believe this is the best time for a writer to sit and write. Invariably, there will be a production delay of six-seven months because of the prevailing conditions, so it's better for writers to pen down new ideas or fine-tune the old ones," he notes, adding that he is keeping himself updated of any changes in the way stories are being told internationally by consuming a lot of content online. "I'm enjoying *Panchayat* on Amazon Prime. It's nicely written, organic and realistic. It's for the first time that I saw a web series which is clean and bereft of foul language. I've completed *Better Call Saul* (on Netflix) long time back but I'm waiting for a new episode to

drop every week. I'm also watching Korean detective thriller *Signal* (Netflix)."

Swaroop, who is right now in Bengaluru along with his wife and daughter, has also watched *Money Heist* fourth season recently but admits to be disappointed with it. "The antagonist of the fourth season is not as strong as the third one. I'm a big fan of the third season," he points out, further revealing that he caught films like *Vikruthi* (Malayalam), *Mirage* (Spanish) and in *Kannum Kannum Kollaiyadithaal* (Tamil).



Shows and films aside, he is helping his wife on the home front, cooking and doing household chores. "I was in the US for 18 months years ago, so I know cooking. I'm good at south Indian cuisine. I've always shared cooking duties with my wife in the past but as she is writing her PhD thesis presently, I'm doing the heavy lifting," he states, with a chuckle.

He is also doing his bit as a citizen.

"I got to know that some of the people I know in Hyderabad are helping the needy with food daily. So I supported food for 300 individuals a week ago. The times are such that it's imperative for us to help the disadvantaged," he concludes. — NG

A day after director Sandeep Reddy Vanga challenged his colleague *ASS Rajamouli* to do the chores of his house and *#BeTheRealMan*, and the latter complied, it's now actors Ram Charan Tej and NTR Jr's turn. The *Baahubali* director, after sharing a video in which he can be seen sweeping, cleaning along with his wife, tagged the actors of his upcoming film *RRR* to do the challenge. Actors Ram Charan and NTR Jr have accepted the challenge on twitter and shared the videos of themselves doing household chores. Looks like the *#BeTheRealMan* challenge is going spread across the Telugu Film Industry, much to delight of their fans.



Rakul enjoys her caffeine-free immunity booster cuppa

Rakul Preet Singh is enjoying her caffeine-free immunity booster, which she feels is extremely necessary during the coronavirus pandemic lockdown.

Taking to Instagram, the actress shared: "We need our immunity to be at its best in times like these and what better way than to do it naturally!"

Rakul Preet also shared the recipe for her fans to follow, because immunity in needed to resist the novel coronavirus.

"@rashichowdhary thankss for the recipe. Add pinch of ginger, pepper, turmeric, cinnamon and cloves to 500 ml water.. let it boil till it becomes half. Add organic honey if you like. It tastes so good and is perfect replacement for caffeine too!! #stayhealthy #stayhome #naturalremedies," she wrote.

The *Dhruva* actress, who is a teetotaler refrains from consuming fast food, sweets, fried and processed food, and works out regularly.

The actress, who was shuttling between Hyderabad and Mumbai before lockdown was announced, will be next seen opposite Nithiin in Chandrasekhar Yeleti's *Check*.



Charandeep enters into food business

Actor Charandeep, who is known for his turns in *Loafer*, *PSV: Garuda Vega* and *Kalki* among others, has stepped into a new business. Joining hands with his friend Sunil Kumar, the actor recently launched an app called Just Happy, which renders door-delivery services of food essentials like fruits, milk, curd, chicken, mutton, fish and such non-vegetarian products. All that a user has to do is order via 'Just Happy'.

In the market for a year, the app is a success story as it nearly 10,000 loyal patrons. The actor is making efforts to expand the footprint in new areas. In Hyderabad, the app is active in Banjara Hills, Jubilee Hills, Film Nagar, Manikonda, Bala Nagar, Chintal, Shapur, Jeedimetla, Suchitra and Kompalli. It's also available in Khammam. "Compared to other online stores, we are offering food at modest prices. We are continuing to offer new discounts every day," Charandeep said.

The actor, who was last seen in megastar Chiranjeevi-starrer *Sye Raa Narasimha Reddy*, is continuing to attract more offers from Tamil and Kannada.

Srikanth distributes sanitisers, masks to cops

Actor Srikanth and his team who has been helping the police and public by providing them with free meals, has on Tuesday, distributed sanitisers and masks to the Banjara Hills police. He was all praise for the efforts by the police department.

